

PROBLEMATIC DRINKING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:  
THE INTERPLAY OF GENDER AND ETHNIC CULTURE

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By

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## **Abstract**

This research examines the drinking patterns of university students and identifies the primary reasons for problematic drinking among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The uniqueness of binge drinking in postsecondary institutions (suggested in previous literature) is considered, as are gendered and racialized patterns of drinking behaviour. Twenty-one semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with university students of Western and Asian origin and of both genders. Social identity theory and role theory were combined under the umbrella of Bourdieu's theory of practice to interpret the gendered and racialized drinking behaviour of these students. Linking the attitudes and motives that individuals have with respect to drinking with their gender and cultural identities, this research reports three key findings. First, the amount of alcohol consumption varies according to an individual's gender and cultural background. Second, identification as a university student and conforming to perceptions of normative drinking on campus strongly influences students' own drinking behaviour, and exaggerates problematic drinking among students. Third, differences in social norms, role expectations, and values clearly correlate with gender and ethnic differences when it comes to drinking behaviour. Based on these findings, the thesis concludes with a discussion of measures for prevention and risk reduction of problematic drinking among university students, and offers directions for future research.

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Finally, I am indebted to my dearest parents for their loving consideration and great confidence in me all through these years. I also owe sincere gratitude to my friends and colleagues who have always been supportive to me.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my great parents Puzhi Miao and Li Qiao, who never stop giving of themselves in countless ways.

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### **List of students' pseudonyms and background**

Alice, a 20 year-old second-year female student from Bangladesh

Allen, a 19 year-old first-year male student from China

Brooy, a 19 year-old first-year male student from Ireland

Daisy, a 20-year old female, second-year international student from New Zealand

Elliot, a male, 21 year-old international third year student from England

Emily, a 20 year-old second-year female student from Canada

Jasmine, a female international second-year student, 20 years old, from India

John, 19 years old, male international first-year student from England

Kate, 20 years old, female second-year Canadian student

Katrina, 21 years old, female third-year Canadian student

Lisa, a 19 year-old female international first-year student from Vietnam

Mia, a 23 year-old female from China, second year student

Nicole, 21 years old, a third-year female Canadian student

Rose, a 19 year-old first-year female student, originally from China, immigrated to Canada when she was 12

Shao, 19 years old, a first-year, male student from China

Tyler, 20 years old, a female Canadian in her second year

Wilson, male, 19 years old, international first-year student from China

Yang, a 23 year-old female international graduate student from China



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introducing Problematic Drinking

Problematic drinking, especially among young adults, is an important public health concern, attracting increased research attention over the past two decades. Studies have shown that alcohol is the most widely used substance among emerging adults (Casswell, Pledger, & Pratap, 2002; Health Canada, 2011). Young people's frequency and quantity of alcohol use steadily increases between the ages of 18 and 22 (Casswell et al., 2002), and alcohol-related problems tend to peak in the early 20s (Kong & Bergman, 2010).

Attending university tends to aggravate young adults' heavy drinking (Johnston, 2013), because of their changed living environment and normative drinking habits on campus (Lewis et al., 2011). Students living in on-campus residences tend to drink more, engage more frequently in binge drinking, and report more alcohol-related negative consequences than those living with their parents (Martin & Hoffman, 1993; Valliant & Scanlan, 1996). Aside from changes in living situations, being away from parents, and the influence of drinking norms on university campuses, students experience a shift of identity from high school to university, which can also lead to an increase in alcohol consumption (Lewis et al., 2011).

Heavy drinking among university students can lead to a variety of serious consequences, such as high-risk sexual behaviour, aggression, poor academic performance, and the use of hallucinogenic or addictive drugs (White & Jackson, 2004). Given the widespread consumption of alcohol among university students and its potentially negative effects, it is important to study the protective and risk factors related to problematic drinking.

### 1.2 Research Question

The research interest of this project was to explore the drinking behaviour of university students and identify the reasons for their decision to drink (or not). The researcher was also interested in exploring the risks of problematic drinking, and protective factors among university students.

Previous studies examining the structural factors related to alcohol consumption from a macro level have suggested that factors such as race, gender, level of education, and religion influence drinking patterns (Courtney & Polich, 2009; Lewis et al., 2011; Paul et al., 2011). Other researchers dealing with university drinking from a micro perspective have focused on factors such as motives for and attitudes about the consumption of alcohol. For example, Kong

and Bergman (2010) suggested that one's motivation to drink—that is, the value placed on the desired results of drinking alcohol—correlates with the amount and frequency of consumption.

The literature focusing on how people's motives for drinking influence their decision to drink fails to take structural factors into consideration. Likewise, studies on the risks and protective factors of problematic drinking seldom deal with why students engage in problematic drinking in the first place. Given that both structural and alcohol consumption factors are associated with drinking patterns, the focus of this research is to link structural factors such as gender, religion and ethnic culture with alcohol consumption factors such as motives for drinking and attitudes about it, and find out if and how these factors affects the drinking behaviour of university students.

Although several studies deal with protective and risk factors related to problematic drinking among university students, limited attention has been paid to the drinking experience of ethnic minorities in Western society. In order to examine this neglected area, this research focuses on the drinking patterns of people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Previous literature on this issue, using quantitative research and model testing, has pointed out that gender and ethnicity have an impact on people's consumption of alcohol and indicated that certain ethnic groups (e.g., Asian Americans) are less likely to be engaged in problematic drinking (Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens, & Castillo, 1994). However, these studies fail to show why women or students of certain ethnic groups are, in fact, less likely to be problem drinkers in the first place; they do not show how and why gender and ethnicity make a difference. This is especially the case in quantitative studies, which are commonly applied in the study of drinking among university students. Thus, the research focus of this study looked closely at the gender and cultural factors affecting the varied drinking patterns among university students. To achieve this, the drinking behaviours of male and female students were compared, as were those of students from different cultural backgrounds. These comparisons aimed to reveal how people's ethnic culture and gender combined with other factors influence their decision to drink alcohol.

### **1.3 Key Concepts**

Key concepts in the research include *problematic drinking*, *gender identity*, and *cultural identity*. Problematic drinking can mean a number of different things. In this research, it means a particular pattern of alcohol use defined as drinking that exceeds levels outlined in Canada's low

risk drinking guidelines and binge drinking. Specific attention is given to drink which comprises the consecutive consumption of alcoholic drinks, five or more alcoholic drinks for men and four or more alcoholic drinks for women, in the same session (Courtney & Polich, 2009; Paul, Grubaugh, Frueh, Ellis, Egede, 2011; Swanson, Zegers, & Zwaska, 2004; Wechsler et al., 1994).

The term *culture* can also be interpreted in a variety of ways. This research borrows Triandis' (1996) definition: "a pattern of shared attitudes, beliefs, categorizations, self-definitions, norms, role definitions, and values that is organized around a theme that can be identified among those who speak a particular language . . . and in a definable geographic region" (p. 408). Culture is a socially (and historically) specified, internally shaped system. In this research, Western culture in particular is defined as a pattern shared by those who are originally from or having an association with Europe. Asian culture in this research refers to such patterns shared by people of Asian origin. It should be noted that the terms *Western culture* and *Asian culture* adopted in this research are very general descriptors of cultural groups that are themselves highly varied or diverse; for example, Asian culture has 15 distinct subgroups. Nevertheless, these general representations have been used because the researcher wanted to generalize features regarding drinking alcohol in each culture group, and to make comparison possible in terms of drinking patterns between the groups. It is important to note that Central and West Asia are out of the scope of this research, as the most common religion in these sub-regions of Asia is Islam, by which drinking alcohol is forbidden.

Third, cultural identity in this research refers to a person's self-identification with a particular group that has distinct characteristics based on geography, ethnicity, history, religion, and language (Ennaji, 2005; Kosmitzki, 1996). Gender identity is not only the self-conception of being male or female; it also refers to the internalization of gender stereotypes and gender roles (Christie-Mizell & Peralta, 2009; Kraus, 2006), and the values related to those gender roles (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

Quantitative studies have failed to capture drinking experiences of university students. This research employs a qualitative approach in order to explore these experiences in detail. Qualitative research can take ethnicity and gender identity into consideration and is more suitable for discovering how the dynamics of gender, culture, and attitudes to alcohol consumption influence individual drinking patterns. It needs to be noted that gender can be greater than a binary categorization (i.e., men and women) as referred to in this research; it

contains bisexual and transgendered persons. However, due to this study's limited sample size, and the participants identifying themselves as either male or female, bisexual and transgendered individuals are beyond the scope of this study.

#### **1.4 Thesis Overview**

To obtain an in-depth and more illuminating understanding of students' drinking behaviour, I conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with students of both genders of Western (e.g., European, American and Australasian in this research) and Asian (e.g., Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, and Bengalese in this research) origin. In order to interpret more fully the subject, a theoretical model linking the alcohol consumption factors (attitudes and motives for drinking) and structural factors (culture and gender identity) is needed. Social identity theory and role theory are combined in this study to help explain the gendered and culturally varied drinking patterns of university students focused on culturally structured role expectations and how they shape one's attitude towards the consumption of alcohol. In order to situate the elements of identity theory and role theory within a more explicit sociological framework, Bourdieu's theory of practice is introduced. By linking structure and alcohol consumption factors together, this research may provide a more in-depth understanding of how they influence individual drinking patterns.

To summarize, taking into consideration the gendered and racialized patterns of drinking behaviours, and the uniqueness of drinking in the university suggested in previous literature, this research addresses the core question: what are the primary reasons for problematic drinking among university students, comparing students from Western and Asian backgrounds? In particular, this research emphasizes how one's social identities (gender, cultural identity, and student identity, i.e., individual's self identification as university students and their academic involvement in particular) interact with normative drinking behaviour on university campuses, how they influence students' attitudes regarding alcohol use and their motives for drinking, and how they affect students' decisions concerning alcohol consumption. In order to interpret the findings of this study, the researcher tried to link university problematic drinking with individuals' identities, attitudes, and norms by examining social identity theory (Turner, 1975) and role theory under the umbrella of Bourdieu's theory of practice.

Following is an outline of each of the six chapters. Chapter 1 provides the general description of the research and narrows down the research focus. Chapter 2 evaluates the

previous literature on university problematic drinking and formulates the research question. It demonstrates the uniqueness of alcohol consumption among university students and identifies the risks and protective factors of university binge drinking from both structural and individual points of view. Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical perspectives guiding the interpretation of problematic drinking among university students. Social identity theory and role theory are examined under the umbrella of Bourdieu's theory of practice to guide the data analysis. Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology, including the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach and how the data analysis was carried out. Limitations of this study are also discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides the findings of this research and its interpretation, describing the drinking patterns of university students found in this research and their attitudes towards and motives for alcohol consumption. As guided by social identity theory and role theory, this chapter also describes the gendered and culturally varied drinking patterns among university students, linking structural and alcohol consumption factors. The conclusion and implications are offered in Chapter 6, which also indicates directions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the existing research on university problematic drinking. In the first part of this chapter, I introduce the issue of problematic drinking among university students, showing the uniqueness of drinking in the university and trends related to students' consumption of alcohol. In the second part, I address factors related to variations in individual drinking habits, such as education, gender, and ethnicity. In the third part, I deal with reasons for alcohol use, focusing on the mechanisms of students' attitudes towards and motives for consuming alcohol. I present the research question and the rationale for it, based on my critical review of the existing literature.

### **2.1 Introducing University Problematic Drinking**

Terms such as *problematic drinking*, and *binge drinking* are used to describe individual drinking behaviours in general.

#### **2.1.1 Terminologies related to alcohol use**

One of the patterns of problematic drinking in this research is drinking that exceeds the levels outlined in the Canada's low risk drinking guidelines. The guidelines outlined the limits of drinking as no more than 10 drinks a week for women, with no more than 2 drinks a day; no more than 15 drinks for men, with no more than 3 drinks a day (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2011). In this research, specific attention is paid to problematic drinking on university campuses. Although it is not the focus of my research, the term binge drinking should be clarified. As one of the patterns associated with problematic alcohol use and a specific concern on university campuses, binge drinking is distinguished by the quantity of alcohol consumed over a comparatively short time period (Courtney & Polich, 2009; Guise & Gill, 2007). As suggested by Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, and Rimm (1995) women have a lower rate of alcohol metabolism than men, making it likely that women will have greater blood alcohol levels than men when they consume the same amount of alcohol. Given men and women's different rates of alcohol metabolism, binge drinking is characterized as the consecutive consumption of alcoholic drinks during the same session: at least five drinks for men and four or more drinks for women (Courtney & Polich, 2009; Paul et al., 2011; Swanson et al., 2004; Wechsler et al., 1994). Within categories of men and women, individuals also vary in their rates of alcohol metabolism. Another decisive indicator related to the definition of problematic drinking is inebriation, which is regarded as the fundamental assumption of bingeing (Courtney & Polich, 2009; Wechsler et al.,

1994).

### **2.1.2 Alcohol consumption among university students: Prevalence and consequences**

Researchers have shown that alcohol is the intoxicating substance most widely used by youth. In 2011, 70.8 percent of youth aged 15–24 years reported alcohol consumption in the past 12 months (Health Canada, 2011). Despite a recent decline in reported prevalence of alcohol consumption among youth (from 78.4 percent in 2008 to 70.8 percent in 2011), 18 percent of youth reported drinking hazardously, exceeding Canada's low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines as released by Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse: 0 to 2 standard drinks a day, less than 10 per week for women; and 0 to 3 standard drinks a day, less than 15 per week for men (Butt et al., 2011). By contrast, the percentage of hazardous drinking for adult drinkers 25 years and older is 12.2 percent (Health Canada, 2011). The amount and frequency of alcohol consumption increases at a steady pace in people between the ages of 18 and 22, and alcohol-related problems are inclined to peak in people's early 20s (Casswell et al., 2002; Kong & Bergman, 2010).

Drinking among university students has garnered increased attention in the past two decades and has become an important public health concern. Currently, binge drinking is a major problem at North American universities. Although data show a slight decrease of heavy drinking among young adults (Ham & Hope, 2003), the problem still warrants serious attention. After drawing a random sample of 105,781 students from post-secondary institutions in Canada, the American College Health Association National College Health Assessment II (ACHA-NCHA II) reported that in 2011 alcohol had been used by 65.9 percent of students during the past 30 days, with 65.7 percent of males and 66 percent of females respectively. Thirty one percent of the drinkers (with 41.5 percent of males and 29.5 percent of females) reported heavy drinking pattern (the usual consumption of more than five standard drinks per occasion) in the past two weeks (American College Health Association, 2011).

Heavy drinking behaviours are associated with specific contexts; for example, heavy drinking is more likely to be engaged in at bars or parties (Ham & Hope, 2003; Harford, Wechsler, & Seibring, 2002), and may happen concurrently with drinking games (Pedersen, LaBrie, & Kilmer, 2009) common among university students. According to Adlaf and colleagues (2005), the average alcohol intake is highest when students drink during parties (6.0 drinks), and in bars (5.1 drinks) or university housing (5.7 drinks). Group size also influences students' alcohol intake. The larger the group, the higher the average alcohol intake becomes (from 1.8

drinks alone to 6.2 drinks in large groups) (Adlaf et al., 2005).

Problematic drinking among university students can result in a variety of negative consequences, leading to missed classes the next day, diminished academic performance, high-risk sexual behaviour, drunk driving, aggression, alcohol poisoning, trouble with the law, and the use of recreational drugs such as hallucinogens (Broadwater, Curtin, Martz, & Zrull, 2006; Pedersen et al., 2009; White & Jackson, 2004; Zufferey et al., 2007).

Frequent, heavy, episodic drinking also affects general health. According to Courtney and Polich (2009), frequent binge drinkers are more likely to report fair or poor health and tend to take more sick days compared with non-binge drinkers. Problem drinkers are more likely to become accident-prone and experience physical injury (Courtney & Polich, 2009; Zufferey et al., 2007). Drinkers may also experience long-term health problems such as cirrhosis of the liver, hypertension, coronary heart disease, and mental health difficulties (Cooke, Sniehotta, & Schüz, 2007; Paul et al., 2011; Pincock, 2003). In the long run, blackout drinking, impaired control, and dependence symptoms are also strongly and conceptually related to problematic alcohol consumption (Read et al., 2008).

Drinking excessively at university may lead to future alcohol-related problems such as dependence (Nguyen, Walters, Wyatt & DeJong, 2011; Read et al., 2008), psychiatric disorders (Carlson, Johnson, & Jacobs, 2010) and financial instability (Stone, Becker, Huber, & Catalano, 2012). Literature shows that in the long term, approximately 16 percent of students who engage in frequent heavy drinking episodes showed alcohol dependence symptoms (Nguyen et al., 2011).

## **2.2 Identifying Factors Related to Individual Drinking Pattern Variation**

Given the widespread use of alcohol and the potentially severe consequences of problematic drinking, it is important to identify the factors relating to problematic drinking. Such factors may include gender, ethnicity, religion, and education. Demographic factors, particularly gender and ethnicity, have been found to be positively associated with problematic drinking. For example, Paul and colleagues (2011) indicated that binge drinking was more common among White or Hispanic young male adults in the United States. Some activities students engage in have been cited as variables associated with moderate to greater problematic drinking in university students (Ham & Hope, 2003). Involvement in religion, for example, may be negatively associated with alcohol use. The role that education plays is ambiguous, as it has been associated with both



increased and decreased risk of alcohol use (Ham & Hope, 2003).

### **2.2.1 Gender**

Problematic drinking behaviours are distributed variously by culture and gender (Weden & Zabin, 2005). Most research indicates that men constitute the overwhelming majority of binge drinkers (Courtney & Polich, 2009; Wechsler et al., 1995). In recent years, however, gender differences may be waning, as women comprise an increasing proportion of those who use alcohol (McHugh, Wigderson, & Greenfield, 2014; Zufferey et al., 2007).

Drinking patterns, motives, and consequences are also distributed differently by gender. According to Swanson and colleagues (2004) more women than men who use alcohol suffer from depression (Swanson, Zegers, & Zwaska, 2004). Thus, experiencing depressive moods may place some women at risk of problematic drinking. However, women report greater conscientiousness regarding drinking than men, which works as a protective factor against problematic drinking (Swanson et al., 2004).

Adverse physical outcomes seem to be the most frequent self-reported consequence among men. As suggested by Perkins (2002), male university students tend to have more public deviant behaviours involving self and others, while female students tend to have consequences that are personal or relatively private. Sexually risky behaviour increases proportionally in conjunction with alcohol consumption for both genders (Zufferey et al., 2007). However, by examining a national sample of female college students, Ullman Karbatsos, and Koss (1999) indicated that alcohol is associated with risk of sexual assault especially among women. In particular, alcohol use prior to sexual assault by both offenders and victims may affect the severity of sexual victimization experienced by women (Ullman, Karbatsos, & Koss, 1999). Alcohol consumption by offenders and victims tends to co-occur especially in social situations such as bars and parties (Abbey et al., 2001; Ullman et al., 1999). Abbey and colleagues (2001) suggested that approximately half of sexual assaults are committed by men who have consumed alcohol. Similarly, approximately half of all sexual assault victims report that they were drinking alcohol at the time of the assault (Abbey et al., 2001).

Binge drinking is also found to be a risk factor for subsequent unintended pregnancy and is associated with adverse health outcomes for both women and their children (Naimi et al., 2003). For women, consequences of binge drinking include unintentional injuries, unprotected and unplanned sexual intercourse, and abortion (Naimi et al., 2003). Poulin and Graham (2001)

suggested that 41 percent of frequent binge drinkers and 20 percent of infrequent binge drinkers had engaged in unplanned sex. In 2011, 16.5 percent of student drinkers (with 18.7 percent of male drinkers and 15.3 percent of female drinkers) reported unprotected sex in the past 12 months (American College Health Association, 2011). And 2.4 percent of female student drinkers reported that they had experienced sex intercourse without giving their consent (American College Health Association, 2011).

For fetuses and children, adverse health effects are associated with alcohol-exposed pregnancies. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) are among the most concerning neurodevelopmental disorders related to alcohol use in pregnancy. In pregnant women, alcohol use is a major concern for the development of fetus due to the teratogenic effects of alcohol, irreversible birth defects, as well as negative impacts on the fetus via poor maternal health (McHugh et al., 2014). The estimated prevalence of FASDs is 2 percent to 5 percent of births. Severe disorders of FASDs include abnormal facial features, growth deficits, and central nervous system defects (McHugh et al., 2014). Early research has focused on pregnant drinkers with problematic use of alcohol or alcohol dependence, as it was believed that only heavy or binge drinking could harm the developing fetus (Sarkar et al., 2009). However, recent research suggests that adverse outcomes may also be associated with low levels of alcohol consumption (McHugh et al., 2014).

Previous studies have found structural factors related to alcohol consumption from a macro-level perspective, suggesting that factors such as race, gender, level of education, and religious involvement influence individual drinking patterns. Other research explores university binge drinking from a micro angle, focusing on alcohol consumption factors, such as motives for drinking and attitudes about alcohol use.

### **2.2.2 Racial differences**

Little published research could be found concerning racial differences among university students in Canada who engage in binge drinking. Given the comparable social and cultural contexts (Bartlett, Robertson-Boersma, Dell, & Mykota, 2015) as well as the perceived drinking norms on university campuses, and despite varied legal drinking ages (Perkins, 2007) between Canada and the United States, the U.S. literature is drawn upon to discuss racial differences among Canadian university drinkers.

Alcohol consumption varies by racial groups. According to Courtney and Polich (2009),

Anglo Americans are involved in four out of five binge drinking episodes, and Hispanic Americans reported the highest average rate of personal binge drinking episodes. The estimated prevalence of binge drinking for Whites is two times greater than that for Asians (Courtney & Polich, 2009). African Americans represented the ethnic group with the lowest binge-drinking frequency, with fewer than five binge drinking episodes per person annually (Naimi et al., 2003). Anglo American and Native American students report the highest rates of negative consequences, whereas Asian American and African American students have the lowest rates of negative consequences (Courtney & Polich, 2009).

### **2.2.3 Religion**

Participation in a religion may play a more significant role than race in preventing individuals from problematic drinking. Many studies indicate that a belief in God and religious practice are related inversely to alcohol-related problems, even among drinkers (Ghandour, Karam, & Maalouf, 2009). Students adhering to Islam and Buddhism may be protected from the temptation to consume alcohol due to their religious faith. Conversely, low religious commitment has been associated with an increased risk of heavy alcohol use (Stone et al., 2012). Religious involvement may also moderate the risk associated with other factors. For example, it may moderate the risk of alcohol use associated with attending university (Stone et al., 2012; White et al., 2008).

### **2.2.4 Education**

Individuals' academic performance and educational background are associated with their probability and frequency of alcohol consumption (Paul et al., 2011). Studies have shown that university attendance is associated with increased risk of alcohol use (Stone et al., 2012). On the one hand, individuals with higher educational attainment are more likely to consume alcohol daily and to be more prone to problematic drinking (Huerta & Borgonovi, 2010). Undergraduates also tend to have higher levels of alcohol consumption compared with young people who do not go to university (Johnston & White, 2003; Norman et al., 2007).

While university attendance may serve as a risk factor for alcohol use, university graduates are less likely to develop alcohol use disorders than people who have not completed university (Sher & Gotham, 1999; Stone et al., 2012). Further, there is gender variation in the effect of education on alcohol use. Women show a stronger relationship between level of education and alcohol use than their male counterparts. As suggested by Huerta and Borgonovi (2010), a high

sense of self-control and an active social life may lead higher educated individuals to engage in more frequent and heavier drinking sessions than their less-educated peers.

### **2.3 Why Individuals Drink: Attitudes, Motives, And Expectations**

Motives are “values placed on the effects of alcohol that individuals want to achieve,” thus motivating them to drink, while expectations are “beliefs about the effects of alcohol” (Kong & Bergman, 2010, p. 865). Expectations include arousal, sexual enhancement, cognitive/motor functioning (Wall, McKee, & Hinson, 2000), social assertion, tension reduction and relief of depression (Wood, Nagoshi, & Dennis, 1992). Cooper (1994) identified four motives for drinking: coping, that is, drinking to relieve depression or anxiety; conformity, to get peer acceptance and social approval and to avoid social censure; enhancement, for the sheer sensation of it; and for social reasons, to obtain positive social rewards.

Scholars found that expectations and motives for drinking are more essential in determining the drinking behaviour of university students than background variables such as age, gender, education, and ethnicity (Wall et al., 2000; Kong & Bergman, 2010). Individuals’ motives for drinking have an impact on the decision to drink by mediating the association between expectations related to alcohol consumption and drinking outcomes. A person’s motives for drinking serve as a mediator for expectations, effects, and alcohol use (Kong & Bergman, 2010).

Psychological theories explaining the motivations associated with university problematic drinking categorize individuals into subgroups. According to Beck and colleagues (1995), drinking behaviours are judged to be different within two subgroups of university students: first, the “sensation seeking personality type”, consisting of individuals who drink for enjoyment or social reasons; and second, the “neurotic personality type,” comprising students who drink for coping—for example, to relieve stress by drinking—or conformity motives. Scholars have also seen gender differences in terms of the motives for drinking. For example, the coping motive is more likely to be related to female students. Schall, Weede, and Maltzman (1991) found that drinking in order to cope with difficulties was the most robust predictor of drinking patterns among women, while students who were self-conscious and anxious, and who drank in order to conform with others and to drink heavily, were more likely to be men. Johnston (2015) similarly shares that women are more likely to suffer from depression of demanding jobs and household work and as such are more likely to drink for coping reasons than men do.

Sensation seeking is suggested to be the best predictor of alcohol consumption among male

students, while for female students, sensation or thrill seeking is not as primary a motive as coping (Cooper, 1994; Ham & Hope, 2003). Social motives may increase the likelihood of drinking alcohol, but do not appear to increase the risk of negative consequences arising from alcohol consumption. Those who drink for social motives consume alcohol more frequently, inspired by the desire to be more sociable in drinking situations, but they may not drink alcohol excessively in a single session (Cooper, 1994).

Some scholars, employing Cooper's motivational model to study an emerging adult population, indicated that enhancement and social motives were strong predictors of alcohol consumption among university students but that coping motives were not, because drinking to socialize was considered the main reason for alcohol use during emerging adulthood (Kong & Bergman, 2010). Students drink at parties in order to enjoy social situations (Johnston & White, 2003; Kong & Bergman, 2010). Binge drinking in the university tends to have a social nature.

Studies found that university students engage in heavy drinking to attain social rewards and achieve positive emotion and feelings, rather than drinking to evade social rejection (Kong & Bergman, 2010). Therefore, searching for enhancement and drinking to have fun becomes a significant motive for drinking among such specific age groups, whereas coping and conforming are seen to be less salient predictors of drinking behaviour among university students (Cooper et al., 1995; Kong & Bergman, 2010).

The literature reveals that both structural and alcohol consumption factors can predict individual drinking patterns. It is also important to recognize that individuals may have multiple bases of identity—for example, a student may be female and Asian. Therefore, the focus of this research is to explore linkages between structural factors (gender, religion, and ethnicity) and alcohol consumption factors (attitudes about and motives for drinking), in order to discover how the structural factors influence the drinking behaviour of university students by directly or indirectly influencing their attitudes and motives of drinking alcohol.

## **2.4 Binge Drinking in Postsecondary Institutions Is a Unique Phenomenon**

Binge drinking in university is a unique form of alcohol abuse. The social environment of university—including living away from family, peer pressure, and freedom from parental regulations—can combine to facilitate problematic drinking among university students (Kong & Bergman, 2010; White et al., 2008). Students who live in residence on-campus tend to consume more alcohol, engage more often in binge drinking, and have more alcohol-related problems than

do those who live at home with their parents (Valliant & Scanlan, 1996).

Aside from changed living environments and being away from parents, drinking norms on university campuses and people's identity shift from high school to university student can also lead to increased alcohol consumption (Lewis et al., 2011). The university campus is an incubator of drinking culture and group norms; binge drinking is widely accepted by students. Thus, becoming a university student means increased chances to establish new drinking norms such as viewing drinking as a positive behaviour, and believing that every student on campus is doing the same. Kong and Bergman (2010) indicate that students' positive expectations and motives regarding the effects of alcohol reflect the normalized drinking culture of emerging adults.

Although researchers focusing on the causes of drinking and binge drinking have pointed out the importance of motives and expectations about alcohol consumption in shaping the drinking pattern of young adults (Guise & Gill, 2007), extensive alcohol consumption nonetheless remains the norm rather than the exception on most campuses (Swanson et al., 2004; Wechsler et al., 2000). Prior research has established an association between norms and alcohol consumption (Borsari & Carey, 1999). Normative perceptions of others' drinking behaviour are strongly related to one's own drinking patterns. University students tend to overestimate the drinking behaviour of others, especially those of the same sex, and the perception that others drink more heavily and more frequently is positively associated with one's own drinking behaviour (Lewis et al., 2011).

Moreover, peers and group identity are considered predictors for increased alcohol consumption among university students (Courtney & Polich, 2009). Johnston and White (2003) indicated that group identity moderates the impact of drinking norms on students' intention to binge drink. Students' decisions to engage in drinking alcohol occur regularly in the context of developing an identity as a university student; behavioural decisions are often strongly tied to membership in a student group. Identity issues and the role of norms associated with such reference groups are central in determining behaviour in peer-influenced decision making among students, such as the decision to drink or take illicit drugs.

The perception of supportive norms may enhance the impact of perceptions on health-risk behaviour (Norman et al., 2007). For example, Leichliter, Meilman, Presley, and Cashin (1998) suggested that involvement in sports influences students' drinking behaviour. Athletes may

control their alcohol intake in order to maintain certain levels of fitness, but binge drink to celebrate the end of the season. Therefore, Leichliter and colleagues (1998) found that university student athletes drink more frequently and report more alcohol-related problems than do non-athletes. According to Cashin, Presley, and Meilman (1998), members of fraternities and sororities are also more likely to engage in binge drinking episodes and experience more alcohol-related negative consequences than non-members.

Taking into consideration the gender and ethnic culture patterns associated with drinking behaviours, as well as the uniqueness of university binge drinking suggested in previous literature, this research also considers how normalized drinking influences students of varied identities. For example, this research examines whether binge-drinking norms affect men and women, or students with Asian or Western cultural backgrounds, differently. This study also makes an effort to explain why there exists gender and racial differences related to individuals' drinking behaviour.

## **2.5 Evaluation of the Existing Research**

In the past two decades, the field of adolescent substance use and antisocial behaviours has grown dramatically through the identification of risk and protective factors, such as habits and precursors that predict an increased probability of problem behaviours, and influences that have the potential to mediate the impact of risk factors or decrease the likelihood of problems (Cleveland, Feinberg, Bontempo, Greenberg, 2008; Stone et al., 2012). Risk and protective factors incorporated in a social development model have clarified a large area of adolescent antisocial behaviour. Adolescent substance use is found to be associated with factors across multiple domains, including individual and personality factors (e.g., sensation seeking, poor impulse control, and insufficient conscientiousness), school environment (e.g., academic failure, commitment to school, and disengagement from school), family (e.g., parental substance use, family conflict, and poor family management practices), community (e.g., community norms favourable to drug use, community disorganization and poverty), and peer groups (Cleveland et al., 2008).

Although a number of studies explore the protective and risk factors related to problematic drinking, little attention has been paid to the drinking experiences of ethnic minorities in Western society. Some studies show that problematic drinking varies among ethnic groups, and that certain ethnic groups are less likely to experience problematic drink. For example, Anglo

American students have the highest rate of heavy drinking, while Asian American youth have the lowest rate of alcohol and drug abuse among racial groups in the United States (Wechsler et al., 1994). However, these studies fail to show why young people of certain ethnic groups are less likely to drink problematically.

Although it is believed that culture and peer groups play an important role in students' drinking behaviour (Ham & Hope, 2003), studies have failed to show which characteristics of ethnic culture and peer groups act as protective or risk factors in problematic drinking, and how these factors operate. Moreover, there is debate on the role of peers and ethnic culture in relation to the drinking behaviour of ethnic minorities. The existing literature displays different understandings about the influence of peer and ethnic cultural values. Some researchers have argued that the drinking behaviour of ethnic minority students is heavily influenced by their peers (Liu & Iwamoto, 2007), while others found that the culture of origin of ethnic minority students plays a predominant role in students' drinking patterns, and that the risk of problematic drinking can be reduced in relation to their culture (Au & Donaldson, 2000).

Liu and Iwamoto (2007) reported that peers exert the greatest influence among young adults of Asian origin. The authors examined the relationship between ethnic values, coping strategies, peer pressure, and substance use, suggesting that peer drug use was the single best predictor of binge drinking among Asian American university students. University students who associated with substance-using peers were twice as likely to engage in binge drinking. The findings also indicated that Asian values were not found to be directly related to how Asian Americans used substances. In contrast, other researchers have found that ethnic minority students were less influenced by their peers to use recreational drugs than their White counterparts. Rather, they were more likely to be influenced by values associated with their origin. A study by Au and Donaldson (2000), which examined the social influences of risk factors for substance abuse for Asian American and White youth, found that drug use was less relevant for Asian Americans than for Whites.

Reasons for alcohol consumption differ depending on ethnic culture and regions of the world. For example, Asian American students are most likely drink to cope and relieve stress, while White students seek enhancement. White students are also more likely to be influenced by their peers in fraternities and sororities (Cashin et al., 1998). Ham and Hope (2003) have suggested that African American students are influenced by academic failure and financial



problems while individual and interpersonal risk factors, such as sensation seeking and peer drug use, were found to be more relevant for White American youth.

Some researchers have suggested that Asian cultures and norms emphasizing the value of responsibility, interdependence, moderation, and restraint play an important role in protecting individuals from substance abuse by moderating the risk effect of substance-using peers. One of the major aspects of traditional Asian values is the importance of strong family ties. Most Asian youth are raised in intact families, where the negative influences of substance-using peers are reduced and values against substance abuse are reinforced (Hong, Huang, Sabri, & Kim, 2011).

Other researchers, however, are suspect about the protective function of the culture of origin. They hold that immigrants in the host society often do not fully maintain the culture of their origin, but, rather, are forced into a process of acculturation. For example, immigrant Asian parents tend to have collective cultural values with a high regard for collaboration and interdependence. Because Western society is a more individualistic culture, immigrant families have to foster the capacity to function differently in their new society (Hahm, Lahiff & Guterman, 2003). Being able to make the cultural shift can pose challenges for them. In the process of shifting from a collective culture to an individualistic one, highly acculturated Asian youth are faced with the struggle to choose between the values of their origin and the values of Western society. As suggested by Hahm and colleagues (2003), failure to negotiate between the two cultures may increase the susceptibility of Asian Americans to use substance. A strong parent-child attachment is considered to be a powerful protective factor for preventing substance use by Asian American youth, but acculturation struggles among the youth is associated with tensions between parents and children, and therefore may increase adolescents' risk of substance abuse. In this way, culture can be both a protective and a risk factor associated with problematic drinking.

The literature focusing on how students' motives for drinking influence their drinking behaviour largely fails to take structural factors into consideration, while the literature on risk and protective factors associated with problematic drinking seldom deal with why students binge drink in the first place. Previous studies of university problematic drinking, based on quantitative research and model-testing approaches, have identified that gender and ethnicity have an impact on an individual's consumption of alcohol, but how and why gender and ethnic culture make a difference remains unclear.

Given the debate on the risk and protective factors related to ethnic culture, and the scant attention paid to the drinking experiences of ethnic minorities in Western society, my thesis has narrowed the research focus to a comparison of drinking behaviour between Asian and Western students. By making this comparison, the research may shed light on the ways in which one's ethnic culture is linked to other factors influencing an individual's intention to problematic drink. And by linking structural and alcohol consumption factors together, the study may offer greater understanding of how the intertwined structural and alcohol consumption factors influence drinking patterns.

This research focus was developed after a critical review of the literature. In short: the study has been designed to address the primary reasons for university problematic drinking among first- and second-year students, including Canadian-born and international students, and to introduce the related theory of drinking in postsecondary institutions. In particular, I focus on how an individual's social identities (gender, ethnicity, and student identities, in particular) interact with normative drinking behaviour on university campuses, influence students' attitudes and motives concerning drinking alcohol. I also looked how it affects students' decisions about drinking and their drinking patterns. The study attempts to link university problematic drinking to students' identity, attitudes, and norms by combining social identity theory (Turner, 1975) and role theory.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL APPROACHES

### 3.1 Theories of Substance Abuse

University problematic drinking, although neither clearly criminal nor deviant (unless individuals are underage), shares some characteristics with substance abuse. Scholars have adopted theories addressing substance abuse or deviance—e.g., social control theory, labelling theory, conflict theory, and social learning theory—to explain alcohol abuse. Some focus on the individual or micro level (e.g., social learning theory), while others focus on the macro level of society and/or the individual's relationship to the society (e.g., social control theory and conflict theory).

Some scholars have tried to explain adolescent substance abuse by constructing an interdisciplinary theory model, incorporating the interpersonal interactions discussed in social learning theory, factors of the structural context argued in social control theory, as well as the motives to drink discussed in the planned-behaviour theory (Weden & Zabin, 2005). Ronald Akers and his colleagues (Lee, Akers & Borg, 2004) linked these two theoretical orientations and built social structure–social learning theory (SS-SL) in their study of adolescent substance use. By extending Sutherland's (1924) social learning theory, they indicated that “social learning is the principal social psychological process by which the social structural causes of crime and deviance have an impact on individual behaviour” (Lee et al., 2004, p 17).

Another example of the micro-macro linkage is seen in Claire Anderson's (1998) cultural identity theory. This author studies drug and alcohol-related norms and behaviours to demonstrate how individual and structural factors contribute to the construction of drug-related identities and lead to substance abuse. Her theory attempts to explain substance abuse as a process of identity reformation characterized by three micro-level components: personal marginalization, ego identity discomfort, and difficulty in defining an identity; three macro-level concepts: popular culture, economic opportunity, and educational opportunity; and two meso-level concepts: social marginalization and involvement in a drug-related subculture (Anderson, 1998).

### 3.2 Understanding University Problematic Drinking

Given the unique characteristics of problematic drinking among university students and its difference from illicit drug abuse, few sociological theories—aside from social learning and social bond theory—directly address the issues. My research aims to address the reasons for

problematic drinking in the university setting, placing an emphasis on exploring gendered and culturally varied drinking patterns of university students. I apply social identity theory (Turner, 1975) and role theory (West & Zimmerman, 1987), and try to integrate these two theories under the umbrella of Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977) to help come to an understanding of university binge drinking. Combining these two theories has enabled me to link the alcohol consumption factors (motives to drink and attitudes) and the contextual factors (gender and culture), and thus explain how social identities (gender identity and cultural identity) influence students' attitudes towards and motives for using alcohol, and have an impact on their decisions about drinking. By examining individual's identity and social context (in both structural and situational level) under the umbrella of Bourdieu's theory of practice, I am able to build a more integrated framework and to explain drinking behaviours in university students.

The next section discusses social identity theory and role theory, as well as how these two theories are examined under the umbrella of Bourdieu's theory of practice to guide the data analysis.

### **3.2.1 Social identity theory**

Social identity is defined as an "individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of social groups, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Kosmitzki, 1996, p. 241). Thus, if viewing gender and ethnic culture as criteria that categorize individuals into different social groups, both gender identity and cultural identity can be seen as subsets of social identity, with cultural identity resulting from an individual's self-identification with a particular group characterized by distinct differences in geography, ethnicity, history, religion, and language (Ennaji, 2005; Kosmitzki, 1996).

Social identity theory is a general theory of social categorization. It explains social behaviours and group processes by creating a continuum between intergroup phenomena and interpersonal behaviour.

When individuals define and evaluate themselves in terms of a self-inclusive social category, two processes come into play: categorization (which perceptually accentuates differences between the in-group and out-group, and similarities among self and in-group members on stereotypic dimensions), and self enhancement, which seeks to favour the in-group over the out-group on relevant dimensions. (Johnston & White, 2003, p. 65)

A particular individual's intention to engage in a behaviour is related to a normative component; that is, to perform or not to perform a certain behaviour is determined by his or her perception of social pressure from significant others (Johnston & White, 2003). Social identities tend to affect behaviour through the mediating role of social norms. Thus, individuals are more likely to perform a given behaviour, if it is seen to correspond with the norms of a particular group with whom they strongly identify (Johnston & White, 2003). Scholars who employ social identity theory argue that people's perception of the social norm has more impact on determining their intentions (Johnston & White, 2003) than do their attitudes, thus resulting in "an overall positive or negative evaluation of the behaviour" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Thus, social identity theory provides a perspective from which to understand individuals' drinking behaviour by linking the behaviour to group norms and expectations. As defined by social identity theory, a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social influence in predicting intentions to binge drink may be obtained by considering the impact of group identification on behaviour (Baker & White, 2010; Johnston & White, 2003). The theory examines the impact that norms and expectations of a specific social group (such as women or university students) have on the drinking behaviour of individuals who strongly identify with that social group. Thus, social identity theory may explain why some identity groups tend to consume more alcohol than others.

### **3.2.2 Role theory**

Previous literature links alcohol use to problematic behaviour and health issues, while this research seeks to understand why gender and ethnic culture result in people's different drinking patterns. Since the 1970s, researchers have defined gender as "pertaining to the psychosocial ramifications of biological sex" (Ayman & Korabik, 2010, p. 158). Gender is a multidimensional phenomenon with various facets, involving gender-role identity, gender stereotypes, gender role attitudes (i.e., perception of appropriate social division of labour for men and women), and values (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Christie-Mizell & Peralta, 2009). As such, gender is "an affective structure of identity and cohesion" (Ferree, 1995, p. 125).

Linking internalized gender roles and attitudes towards alcohol, via the perspectives of social practice theory and role theory, can help explain the relationship between drinking patterns and gender. Gender identity is not only the individual's self-conception, but also derives from the internalization of the social norms and expectations related to the genders (Krais, 2006).

Individual gender identity is socially constructed by practice—“doing gender.” According to Kraiss (2006), “the individual must experience norms, values, and roles as an externally imposed and confining identity” (p. 125). The social construction of gender role shapes how the body is perceived and forms the body’s habits, thus determining one’s gender identity as masculine, feminine, transgender or bisexual, etc. One can view identity as a social structure, created and recreated by social beings and influenced by other social structures such as culture (Kraiss, 2006).

Role theory emphasizes the social and dynamic aspects of role construction and performance (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The sociological concept of *role*, as defined by Kraiss (2006), “is based on a fundamental opposition between the individual and society, in which the individual is initially thought of as an ‘asocial’ subject upon whom specific rules and norms are imposed ‘from outside’, that is, by society” (Kraiss, 2006, p. 127). Social role is conceived of as a system of behavioural expectations, which can be traced to overarching rules, norms, and mechanisms that transform individual action into social action (Kraiss, 2006).

Gender role, a subset of social role, is constructed out of the differences between women and men (or alternative identities in relation to these) resulting from the internalization of gender roles, and the shared expectations of men’s and women’s attributes and social behaviours. These have been adopted in people’s early development and define socially valued behaviour for genders (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001). Once constructed, these differences are used to reinforce the essentialness of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Therefore, gender role is an achieved status, constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means (Costa et al., 2001; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Role theory may serve as a theoretical lens that helps us understand why alcohol consumption varies by gender. Individuals who internalize traditional gender role attitudes—man as breadwinner and woman as caregiver, for instance—tend to be motivated to conform to gender norms and expectations. Research shows that traditional gender role attitudes are associated with less frequent alcohol consumption for both men and women, but gender role is not found to be related to the number of drinks consumed in a single session (Christie-Mizell & Peralta, 2009).

Moreover, gender role is a cultural and social creation. Scholars see variations in the perception of gendered behaviour across different cultures (Costa et al., 2001; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In some cultures, differences in gender role may be significant; in others,

they may be less well defined. Since gender and culture coexist in a symbolic relationship (Ayman & Korabik, 2010), the manner in which gender, embedded in social expectation and norms, influences people's decisions about drinking is important to study. Role theory can help to illuminate the interrelationship between gender and culture enabling the researcher to examine how culturally constructed gender roles influence the drinking behaviour of university students.

However, identity theory and role theory have their limitations on explaining drinking behaviour. For example, identity theory and role theory tend to view human action as mechanical reactions, determined by rules attached to certain roles, and failing to notice that each agent's practice has its own flexibility and sometimes can be less sensible or reasonable. The lack of comprehensive analysis of the relations among identity, social context and human action is another limitation of applying identity theory and role theory. Owing to these two limitations, there was a need to examine identity theory and role theory under the umbrella of Bourdieu's theory of practice to guide the data analysis.

### **3.2.3 Individual identity, social context and human action**

Before a further discussion of how the theoretical perspectives are used to guide the data analysis, the linkages between individual identity, social context (at different levels, including situation and structural), and behaviour should be spelled out. Behaviour (drinking behaviour, in this case), adhering to practical logic, has both social meaning and occurs in a social context. This study does not take a deterministic view in which human action is fully determined by structure. Rather, relying on Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice, it views social life as a mutually constituting interaction of structures, dispositions and human actions. Disposition, the cognitive and non-cognitive habits of mind and body (Nash, 2003), plays an important role in employing Bourdieu's analysis into my research. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 16), disposition is a natural tendency that are "deposited within the individual in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action" in a specific field of practice. It is learnt within specific social contexts and informs people's action (Nash, 2003), and by doing this, it links structure to practice.

Bourdieu's theory of practice views social structures to be embedded in individual behaviour, while at the same time individual behaviours contribute to the constitution or reproduction of social structures. That is, social structures and their embodied knowledge produce enduring orientations to human action (Calboun et al., 1993). On the one hand, these

orientations shape human action or social practice, while on the other, they are shaped by action or practice in Bourdieu's perspective. And during this process, in turn, structures are constructed.

Practice is a process in which elements of social structures embedded in individual behaviour and structured by cultural orientations, personal trajectories, and other social resources within a specific social field or context. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, defined as "durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. vii), captures the structured and structuring characteristics of orientations. Individuals acquire habitus, which regulates the range and types of possible actions that an actor may pursue within specific situations.

"Habitus is inscribed in the social construction of self, functions on an unconscious plane, serves as a site of the constitution of the person-in-action" and can be transposable from one field to another (Calboun et al., 1993, p. 5). According to Bourdieu, the dispositions of a certain action integrate an individual's past experiences, functioning as a matrix of appreciations, perceptions and actions and serves as the strategy of diversified tasks (Joas & Knöbl, 2009). Since these dispositions are determined by socialization and are stamped onto our bodies, they can be retrieved without conscious awareness and can predetermine what form action takes (Joas & Knöbl, 2009).

Bourdieu's theory of practice is dialectic of the internalization of the externality and the externalization of internality (Calboun et al., 1993). According to Bourdieu, the system of dispositions is "an internal law relaying the continuous exercise of the law of external necessities" which serves as the principle of the continuity which objectivism discerns in the social world (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 81). Since the dispositions and the situations are engendered by the objective structures, the determinate conjunctions constituted by the dispositions and situations are never independent (Bourdieu, 1977). So to some extent, as a system of structure and structuring dispositions, habitus can be seen as the dynamic intersection of individual, action and social context. The notion of habitus enables me to analyze drinking behaviour of university students as objectively coordinated and at the same time without losing the reflexivity of the agents (e.g., students in this case). The correspondence between social contexts and agents is mediated and generated by habitus.

Social practice and the factors that influence action are situated, for Bourdieu, within a specific *field*: a multidimensional space of position and the position taking of agents (Bourdieu,



1977). According to Bourdieu (1977), field is semiautonomous as characterized by its own logic of action, agents, and its own accumulation of history. It links behaviour and the social context: each field has its own principles of action, and these principles of action structure the choices and preferences of individuals in these contexts. According to Bourdieu, the flexibility of action within the boundaries set by the habitus. A special habitus is moulded by rules that apply within the specific fields, and those who enter them inescapably adapt to this habitus (Joas & Knöbl, 2009). By internalizing the rules and principles in each field, people are socialized into a system of dispositions that enables them to produce on the appropriate occasion skilful social activity that embodies, sustains and reproduces the social field that in turn governs their activity (Bourdieu, 1977). In line with the rules that pertain within a specific field, actors pursue their interests and accumulate symbolic capital as they relate to this field, because they have become habituated to them (Joas & Knöbl, 2009).

The notion of field is not fully employed in this research. Although this research concerns students in postsecondary education, the whole field of postsecondary education is not explored in this research. Rather, the present research explores elements in which students interact outside of formal classes or activities, for example, in a drinking party or an orientation held by a particular program. Through informal activities outside of formal curriculum students develop their habitus and acquire their social and cultural capitals.

### **3.2.4 Examining gender identity under Bourdieu's notion of habitus**

Social context comprises the culture in which people are educated, the norms that they internalize, and the institutions with which they interact (Hamilton, 1990). Identity and behaviour are linked by the notion of norms (culturally appropriate expectations) and its allied concept of role (a set of norms attached to a social position; Scott & Marshall, 2009). Individuals conform to norms through actions and behaviours, demonstrating that they are a particular kind of person. By doing this, they are validating an identity. Habitus embodies parts of our identities in that have set preferences influence our choices as well as how we think of ourselves in relation to other people and particular social settings. To some extent, habitus is part of our identity. When identity is validated or meanings attached to human behaviour are turned into structure, they begin to constrain or at least have an impact on an individual's behaviour. As such, structure is both the medium and the outcome of the actions, which are recursively organized by structures (Scott & Marshall, 2009).

According to Bourdieu (1977), structures are active only when embodied in a competence acquired in the course of a particular history. As an internalization of the externality, habitus can serve as regularities even without a rational basis. “One of the fundamental effects of habitus is the production of a common sense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on meaning of practices” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80). This research views the meaning or common sense of maleness and femaleness as a production of habitus.

Human beings are socialized into the system of dispositions that enables them to set preferences on who we are and choice on the appropriate behaviours according to specific occasions. As such, habitus is inscribed in the social construction of self (Calboun et al., 1993) and thus becomes part of our identity. According to Bourdieu (1977), the meaning or common sense attached to gender identity produced by habitus is a political mythology that governs all bodily experiences. “Bodily hex is political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of feeling and thinking.” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 94) The disposition which myth-ritual logic makes between the male and female organizes the values and rules of an individual’s action.

In summary, by situating an individual’s identity and role in relation to Bourdieu’s theory of practice, this research aims to address the primary reasons for gendered and cultural patterns of university problematic drinking. Key in analyzing the data collected in this research is to understanding how culturally constructed gender roles influence drinking behaviours of university students. Although identity theory and role theory may explain why some identity groups (gender and ethnic groups in this research) tend to consume more alcohol than others, there are limits to these theories being used to address the drinking behaviour of university students. Rather than abandoning these theories, this research fits identity and role theory into Bourdieu’s theory of practice and uses the theory of practice as a guide to analyze an individual’s drinking behaviour.

According to Bourdieu (1977), individuals internalize the objective structures and contexts and as such develop their habitus. So fitting role and identity into the theory of practice in this research provides a comprehensive analysis of the relations among gender and cultural identity, social context (in both structural and situational level), and people’s drinking behaviour. In addition, given that the habitus has both conformity and regularity, as well as negotiated and strategic nature, it allows the agents to immediately adopt them to each situation as it arises

(Bunn, 2016). Applying the notion of habitus to analyze the data that follows enables me to understand how and to what extent do individuals engender their thoughts and perceptions related to problematic drinking in the university, as well as how do they act according to their living experiences and within the socially situated context on campus. To sum up, the research question may be answered by explaining how habitus interacting with an individual's identity and the external social contexts influences student's attitudes and motives of drinking alcohol, and how this dynamic eventually shape their drinking patterns.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach to address my research question; a description of the method of data collection, including interview questions, access and consent, and ethical concerns; the criteria employed in sampling; the analytic method applied to this research, and limitations of the study.

### 4.1 Rationale for Qualitative Techniques

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because of the limited amount of qualitative research addressing problematic drinking among university students, and the relatively insufficient understanding of problematic drinking among ethnic minority youth. Further, researchers who mainly used quantitative approaches to analyze university problematic drinking have identified factors that influence drinking behaviour without adequately taking into account the complexity of this phenomenon. For example, the debate about how culture and peer groups influence students' drinking behaviour isolates the risk/protective factors from each other. It fails to consider how a person's cultural background may influence the way in which youth make friends and thus moderate peers' influence on their drinking behaviour.

As suggested by Gire (2002), "drinking . . . is a multidimensional phenomenon whose initiation and scope are influenced by a wide range of factors" (p. 216), such as gender, religion, and ethnic culture. Quantitative techniques tend to oversimplify data analysis in order to reach "significance," so that the findings do not generalize to "real problems in the real world" (Neilsen, 2004). Alternatively, qualitative approaches can enable the researcher to study and describe such complex phenomena by focusing on vivid individual experiences (Anderson, 2010). Failure to fully appreciate the complexity of university problematic drinking may result from the weakness of the quantitative method, which is widely applied in addressing the issue of university problematic drinking.

Moreover, correlations produced in quantitative data, for example between gender and alcohol consumption, may mask or ignore underlying causes or realities. Compared with survey research, qualitative data collected from interviews can capture the richness of experience and enable participants themselves to explore the how and why of problematic drinking.

In order to contribute to further understanding problematic drinking among university students, this study tries to situate university students' problematic drinking in a social context, by studying how a student's culture of origin and gender identity interact with other factors such

as motivation, drinking expectations, and social and school activities. In contrast to quantitative research, the qualitative approach emphasizes discovery and description. This allows for a more detailed and deeper examination of an individual's experience (Anderson, 2010), making it more suitable for exploring individual attitudes towards drinking and offering a new angle for taking ethnicity and gender identity into consideration. The qualitative approach used in this study provides detailed personal experiences of the dynamic of gender and attitudes to drinking alcohol and how these dynamics influence drinking patterns.

#### **4.2 The Site of Research**

The research site was the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) that is located in a prairie province in western Canada. The University is a comprehensive medical-doctoral institution, and therefore attracts students into a wider range of fields and programs. In 2015, the total number of students at U of S was 19,754, of which 16,869 were undergraduates and 2,885 were graduate students. International students comprised 2,238 of the total. The top five countries of origin of international students were China, Nigeria, India, Iran, and Bangladesh (University of Saskatchewan Enrolment Report Fall 2015).

Like most universities in North America, excessive drinking, especially among first-year students, is identified as an important public health concern on the U of S campus (Robinson, Tanaka, Robertson-Boersma, Dell, & Butt, 2012). According to the American College Health Association (2011), in 2011, 76.4 percent of U of S students reported alcohol use in the last 30 days and 41.7 percent of these drinkers reported binge drinking within the last two weeks. In response, only minor attention has been paid to high-risk student drinking, and limited practices have been taken to tackle the problem on campus (Bartlett et al., 2015). In 2011, undergraduate students launched a binge drinking prevention initiative (BDPI) to address high-risk alcohol consumption on campus (Bartlett, 2015). BDPI did not promote total prohibition, but was formed with the goal of creating a sustainable macro-level initiative that would increase awareness and knowledge of binge drinking. It aimed to reduce binge drinking and its associated harms by advocating a culture of moderation (Robinson et al., 2012).

#### **4.3 Interview Guide and Issues of Ethics**

To obtain in-depth, compelling data, semi-structured interviews were conducted. In order to collect rich information and avoid the simplicity of survey research, questions about the participants' personal experiences of drinking and life were asked. The interview questions dealt

with each participant's alcohol use, highlighting the frequency and amount consumed on single occasions. Data on the frequency and amount of each individual's alcohol use enabled a distinction between problematic drinkers—that is, in this research people who exceed the low-risk drinking guidelines and people who binge drink—and non-problematic drinkers, those who did not.

Also included in the interview were questions dealing with the following:

- Individual demographics
- Family values towards alcohol
- Individual beliefs and attitudes regarding the use of alcohol
- Social expectations of gender role and drinking behaviour in their culture of origin
- The student's family and school life
- Involvement with family members
- Description of their peers
- Relationship with parents and peers

Data collected from the interviews also allowed for cross-case comparisons and analysis. In this analysis, a comparison was made between men and women of Western and Asian origin. The comparative study of the two groups was designed to help clearly identify how gender identity and social expectations of gender role influenced drinking attitudes and the students' consumption of alcohol.

To obtain a better understanding of the drinking behaviours of university students and how it may be related to students' gender identity and cultural background, 21 individual interviews were conducted among first- and second-year students at the U of S. Participants were recruited via advertisements indicating the study's purpose and requirements. Once the prospective participants contacted the researcher and showed interest in the study, an electronic consent form was sent for the participants to review (see Appendix A). The form, in person, was signed once the participant fully understood its content and before he or she was interviewed. The consent form covered ethical issues of confidentiality, compensation, and participant's rights, and included statements such as:

- Participation in this study is voluntary and all of the methods (i.e., interview, audio recording, and transcript) are specified in the consent form and participant's permission will be

asked for. Those who grant permission for audiotaping may request that the recording device be turned off at any time.

- Participants may answer the questions they are comfortable with and have the right to refuse to answer some or all of the questions.

- Participants may withdraw from the research project for any reason and at any time. When one withdraws, his/her data will be deleted from the research project and destroyed, if desired.

- Participants' confidentiality is safely protected. Identifying information is stored separately from the data collected. Although direct quotations from interviews may be reported, participants are referred to a pseudonym they chose for themselves and all identifying information is removed from the report.

- After the interview, and prior to the data being included in the final report, participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of their interviews, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as they see fit.

- In appreciation for their participation, participants will receive an honorarium valued at \$10.

- A summary of results from the study will be provided to all the participants.

This research received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Board. Interviews were carried out in an open-ended style and varied in length from 45 minutes to one hour. The data were collected in the meeting room of the Murray Library from 19 November 2014 to 17 December 2014. All the interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed for analysis.

#### **4.4 Reflexivity and Reliability of the Research**

Given that the themes were identified from the data, the researcher required an awareness of self and reflexivity, that is, “an awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process” (Robson, 2002, p. 22). In a qualitative study, researchers are seen as social beings, whose standpoints, assumptions and experiences can influence their perception of social processes observed (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Through telling the stories of the research subjects, qualitative researchers also impart knowledge about their lives and ultimately about their “selves” (LaRossa, 2005). As a

female international student originally from China, I made use of my gender and cultural background as a point of departure in the formulation of the research question. My cultural background and life experience in Canada inspired me to study the culturally varied drinking patterns of university students. Being female also sensitized me to examine the culturally embedded gender roles in the two societies, Western and Asian. In this way, my cultural background and gender identity strengthened the research and facilitated a better understanding of the drinking patterns of university students from diverse backgrounds.

It is important for myself as the researcher to immerse myself in the data; however, the reliability of the study needs to be assured. To maintain reliability, researchers must themselves be honest and vigilant about their own perspective, pre-existing thoughts and beliefs, and be careful in developing the hypotheses. On the other hand, researchers should be detached from, but not abandon, their previous knowledge and assumptions, in order to analyze the data with an open mind (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

#### **4.5 Sampling Strategy**

This research employed a theoretical sampling strategy, which involves recruiting participants with different experiences of a certain social phenomenon (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Theoretical sampling concerns multiple groups of individuals. The groups of people selected in this research consisted of first- and second-year university students with varying ethnic backgrounds.

The selection of certain groups is based on theoretical significance. Attendance at university is so as accelerating drinking due to a drinking culture on university campus (Johnston, 2013). The reason for targeting first- and second-year university students was that drinking norms on campus are commonly accepted by these particular students who are more likely to be involved in problematic drinking. Studies suggest that problematic drinking is of particular concern for first- and second-year students who are confronted with numerous developmental challenges, both academic and social, in new environments (Palfai & Ralston, 2011). Senior students drink somewhat less in comparison with their junior counterparts, as they mature out (Ham & Hope, 2003). However, studies also suggest that a pro-drinking mentality is passed down by senior students to freshmen, even in the first week of class. Upper-year students seem to feel that “it is the responsibility of upper years to get first year students drunk” (Robinson et al., 2012, p. 10). The developmental challenges are not only faced with first- and second-year undergraduates,



some international students who recently came to Canada may also face with challenges such as identity (re)forms, stressors from being away from home and language barrier etc. So the participants of this research are not exclusive to first- and second-year undergraduates, an international female graduate student who recently came to Canada is also interviewed.

The sample size was determined by “theoretical saturation.” This means that the researcher continues to add research subjects to the sample until the data fully represent all the themes that make up the theory (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

To explore how gender and culture influence students’ attitudes to drinking and their drinking behaviours and to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research question, 21 interviews were conducted with both male and female students from Western and Asian origins. Given the wide diversity contained in so-called Eastern culture, and to avoid the wide cultural variation among students from Asian countries, East Asian students were selected as research subjects to fulfill the niche of ethnic minority students in this study.

The sample of 21 participants allowed for a comparative analysis between genders and differing cultural backgrounds. In order to compare the Western and Asian students, 11 from Western background and 10 from Asian backgrounds were selected. Among those of Asian background, both foreign-born Canadian (those born in Asian countries and who immigrated to Canada with their parents when they were young) and international students were selected. Foreign-born Canadians have both Western and Eastern cultural backgrounds that are integrated in an interesting way, which may lead to a unique understanding and experience of drinking.

Theoretical sampling may not be as representative as random sampling. In this research, an online recruitment strategy was used—posting an advertisement on the university website. When the students were willing to participate in the study, they emailed the researcher to sign up for the interview. The online procedure may have eliminated some individuals who were problem drinkers and who might not have been identified or reached.

#### **4.6 Methods of Analysis**

This section demonstrates how the data were analyzed. The core of qualitative research, an inductive approach, is to unpack textual material by coding and explanation (LaRossa, 2005) and “allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). As suggested by the literature, the first step in data analysis is to identify and distinguish the topics or terms related to the research question from the raw data

(Thomas, 2006). For example, topics such as “motives for drinking” or “attitudes towards drinking” were categorized. In order to identify the topic and terms related to the research question, the interview transcripts were read in detail.

After gaining a thorough understanding of the interview content, the researcher began the process of coding, which, according to LaRossa (2005), is built upon empirical and conceptual comparisons. In this step, concepts (or variables) were developed through breaking down data into discrete parts. Some salient themes were identified through searching for the concepts or phrases that were frequently used by the participant; at the end of the study, no new theme was identified. Besides developing concepts, this process also involved a process of categorization (LaRossa, 2005) in which similar kinds of information were grouped together to create themes. For example, when students spoke about their drinking behaviour, they used phrases such as “I drink to hang out with friends,” “I drink to be sociable,” or “I like the feeling of I get when I drink,” or “I drink to get high.” Such frequently used terms were “subsumed under a higher level heading” (LaRossa, 2005, p. 843) (i.e., grouped together into a category) and labelled as “social drink motives” or “enhancement motives.” The label for each category “carries inherent meanings that may or may not reflect the specific features of the category” (Thomas, 2006, p. 240). Moreover, similarities and differences between subgroups—for example, drinking patterns of female vs. male or Western vs. Asian students—were also explored.

The third step in data analysis was to reduce redundant or overlapping themes and select appropriate interview segments which “convey the core theme or essence of a category” (Thomas, 2006, p. 242). Although variables were elaborately developed in the previous steps, how they were interrelated remained unexplored. So in the next process, links were made between each category to create linkages. The links were based on commonalities or differences between subgroups. For example, in this research, questions such as “what are the commonalities in drinking attitudes that relate to students from Western society?” or “how do drinking behaviours vary depending on an individual’s gender identity or cultural background?” were answered by building links between different categories.

In order to tell the research story, researchers must also identify a central variable, one that is well grounded in the textual materials and serves as the backbone of the writing (LaRossa, 2005). In this research, culturally constructed gender role serves as the core code, because it explained most of the variation in the data. Links were also made to disclose some relationships

between gender and cultural background. In this case, linkages among gender roles, drinking attitudes, and drinking behaviours were built through data analysis. That is, the students explored the question of why their gender identities and cultural backgrounds were associated with particular motives for drinking and attitudes towards drinking, and how these factors influenced their drinking behaviours. The final step in the data analysis of this research entailed going back into the literature to find possible explanations for the findings that emerged in the research. The next chapter presents the findings of the research and the discussion of findings.

#### **4.7 Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this research was the representative bias of the interview sample. This research applied theoretical sampling, which may not be as representative as random sampling. Clearly, different information might have been collected from a different sample of individuals. The data were collected only from students of the University of Saskatchewan, and so failed to capture regional factors that might have been obtained from a wider sample of students at other universities in Canada. Moreover, owing to the online recruitment strategy, consisting of advertisements posted on the university website, once the students self-identified their willingness to participate in the study by emailing the researcher and signing up for the interview, individuals who were already problem drinkers might not have come forward.

Second, drinking behaviour was assumed as a planned or intended activity during the exploration of the reasons for drinking among university students. This research failed to consider circumstances in which drinking may be more situational or spontaneous. In some cases, students may not intend to drink alcohol but end up drinking because everyone else in a situation was drinking. It is also possible that a student may not intend to binge drink on one occasion, but fail to control his or her alcohol intake and drink excessively.

Third, this research aimed at exploring how an individual's cultural identity affected their drinking patterns by comparing students from Western and Asian cultural backgrounds. It failed to take into consideration students from other cultures, such as those from Africa or Latin America. Moreover, the research did not consider all the many distinct subgroups of Asian culture, of which there are at least 15, each with distinct drinking attitudes and drinking behaviours. For example, as suggested by LaBrie and colleagues (2011), Filipino and Korean university students tend to hold more positive attitudes towards alcohol and drink at higher levels than do Vietnamese or Chinese subgroups (LaBrie et al., 2011, p. 359). This research was limited

to students from China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and India, and referred to Asian culture in general, while students from other Asian cultures, such as Japan and Korea, were not included in this research. In addition, the outcome of this research also omitted the role of acculturation of people from Asian origin.

Lastly, the research recorded here focuses mainly on the gendered and cultural differences of student drinking patterns, and how these differences associated with attitudes and motives influenced students' drinking behaviours. It cannot possibly consider fully all the risks and protective factors involved in binge drinking.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

In the first section I offer a description of participants' demographics, followed by an overview of their drinking patterns and the general findings about drinking characteristics among university students, highlighting the high sense of self-management of university students and normative drinking in university residences.

In the second section statements related to the main research question are presented: how students' social identities influence their attitudes to and motives for drinking and influence their drinking patterns, comparing men and women of Western and Asian background. Having compared participants' cultural backgrounds, in the third section I discuss the cultural roots of the students' attitudes and motives, and identify the relationship between their gendered drinking behaviour and internalization of gender roles.

### **5.1 General Findings**

#### **5.1.1 Demographics of the participants**

Twenty-one students participated in this research: 13 thirteen women and eight men. Fifteen (70 percent) participants were first- and second-year students. The average age of participants was 19.8 years old, ranging from 18 to 23 years. Six participants identified themselves as religious; two were Catholics, one was Muslim, and three were Protestants.

The sample included students from both Western and Asian origins. Ten were Asian: seven women and three men. Eleven students were of Western origin: six women and five men. The sample also included international students and Canadians who had had and had not had overseas study experience. Based on the sample size for this research, with 21 interviews conducted, the findings may not be generalizable.

Participants were asked to describe their alcohol consumption in the preceding 12 months, their motives for drinking, and their attitude towards alcohol consumption and problematic drinking, especially binge drinking. Participants linked their gender and cultural background to their drinking behaviours, by talking about if or how these two factors influenced their alcohol consumption, and their understanding of drinking culture in Canada. Students, if not originally from Canada, were also asked to compare the drinking culture in Canada and their country of origin.

#### **5.1.2 Participants' alcohol consumption**

This section focuses on general findings about the drinking patterns of the participants,

including the frequency and amount of their use of alcohol. Genders were compared with student origin in terms of alcohol consumption.

Eighteen participants identified themselves as users of alcohol, while three indicated that they had never used alcohol. The amount of alcohol use reported varied from zero to eighteen standard drinks per occasion. Not every participant drank every week, explaining the average number of drinks consumed per week at 1.67 and average number of drinks per occasion at 3.76. If participants did drink, they often drank more than the amount indicated by the low risk drinking guideline of no more than two drinks per day for women and three drinks per day for men. Among the 18 users of alcohol, 10 responded that the amounts they drank exceeded the low-risk drinking guideline.

The amount of alcohol consumption varied corresponding to gender and cultural background. When taking gender into consideration, male participants consumed 4.6 drinks per week, twice that of female participants at 1.5 drinks per week. The difference between occasional alcohol consumption of both genders was not as large as the weekly consumption, where women tended to take 3.2 drinks on average, and men 4.5.

Huerta and Borgonovi's (2010) findings may serve as a possible explanation of the shrinking gap between the occasional alcohol consumption of the two genders. They suggest that an active social life may lead better-educated individuals (university students in this case) to engage in more frequent and possibly heavier drinking sessions than their less-educated peers. Women show a stronger relationship between level of education and alcohol use than their male counterparts. Thus, female university students may be likely to have more drinks per occasion and, as such, contribute to the shrinking gap for occasional alcohol consumption between the two genders.

Although there is no substantial gender gap in terms of alcohol consumption per occasion, female students generally drink less frequently, as compared with their male counterparts. For example, Emily, a second-year female student from Canada, said, "the amount of my alcohol consumption fluctuates a lot. On average I probably drink less than one (standard drink) per week, because I do not drink very often at all. Per occasion I might have two." Although not drinking on a weekly basis, some female students may drink over the low risk drinking guidelines when they do. Nicole, a third-year female Western student, expressed a similar view, saying, "I drink once a month, maybe three or four drinks per occasion."

Male students tended to drink more alcohol more frequently compared to female students. Brooy, a male first-year student from Ireland, said, “When I drink, I drink a bottle of wine per occasion (which can be counted as five standard drinks), and one to three times per week.” Allen, a male first-year student from China, said that he drank twice a week and had three shots per occasion. Given the theoretical sampling strategy and limited sample size, binary gender variables (males and females) were examined in the thesis. The drinking behaviours of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two spirit, queer, and questioning people (LBGTT2IQQ) were not included in this research because none of the participants in my sample identified themselves as LBGTT2IQQ. The findings, especially in those specific to the amount of alcohol consumed by students and their drinking motives, may be different if my sample contained sexual minorities. Studies have showed that lesbian and gay youth are at greater risks of problematic drinking compared with their heterosexual counterparts because of their minority status (caused by discrimination and internalization of heterosexist social and cultural attitudes) (Cochran & Cauce, 2006; Hughes, Szalacha, & McNair, 2010; Baiocco, D’Alessio, & Laghi, 2010). In particular, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals are more likely to report binge drinking compared to heterosexual individuals (Hughes et al., 2010; Baiocco et al., 2010). And generally, LBGTT2IQQ individuals are more likely to use alcohol as a coping strategy (Baiocco et al., 2010).

The gendered pattern of alcohol use found in this research corresponds to the existing literature. However, my research found a wide gap between people of Western and Asian origins in terms of alcohol consumption. Female students of Western origin consumed five times as much as women from Asian origin in any single occasion. The three non-drinkers in this research were women of Asian origin. On average, female students of Asian background consumed 1.14 drinks per occasion, while female students of Western origin consumed 5.75 drinks per occasion. In parallel to the results for women of the two groups, male students of Asian origin consumed 2.5 drinks per occasion, while male students of Western origin consumed 5.8 drinks per occasion. Although not as large as the difference between women of Western and Asian origin, the gap in alcohol consumption between men from the two origins still existed. And as can be seen from the statistics, gender difference in the amount of alcohol consumed was less marked than cultural difference.

### 5.1.3 Where to drink and with whom?

The alcohol use of university students is associated with context-specific situations, such as parties or bars. On a typical Friday night, most of the participants want to have fun with friends. One of the most common social activities is to go to a party or bar. John, a male first-year student from England, said, “I go to the bar once a week, or twice a month. Most of the time, I go with friends. We talk and play games . . . most times just relaxing and talking, sharing stories of the week.”

Nicole, a female third-year Western student, felt similarly, stating:

It is something you do want on Friday or Saturday . . . just go out and have some fun. After a long week, you kind of just want to relax a little bit. It is something you do other than studying. Just get out for a bit from your dorm or your house to socialize, talk, and most of time just hang out at those parties.

Some students would have a first drink at a friend’s home and then go to a bar. Tyler, a female Western student in her second year, revealed that she went to parties three times per month:

It is nice to go somewhere with friends—drinking, dancing, meeting people, and hanging out with friends. There are usually five to 15 people in a house party . . . We would have a smaller gathering and then go to the bar. We would split up and everyone would wander around.

According to participants, bars are not as accepted as other venues, because of the expense and the atmosphere in them. Female students preferred to drink at house parties with their friends or roommates. For example, Katrina, a female third-year Western student, said:

I prefer to just stay at the party. I do not really like the bars. In the bars, there are always annoying people, people that you do not feel comfortable with . . . and they’re loud and crowded, and the drinks are expensive.

Yang, a female international graduate student from China, expressed a similar view:

I went to bars once or twice, it was my friend or classmate invited me to the bar. I do not like bars. Most of people in the bar get drunk and are very crazy. But in the parties, we can make food and have one or two drinks. So I prefer parties.

The preference for going to an alcohol-oriented party rather than a bar can be related to the social drinking motive of university students. For some students, bars were not a good place for them to socialize with friends.

To summarize: in parallel to what emerges from the literature, the amount and frequency of



alcohol use of university students varied by gender and ethnicity. Male students tended to drink more frequently than their female counterparts. The frequency and amount of alcohol consumption of students from Asian cultural backgrounds were found to be lower than students of Western origin. And university drinking was most often associated with a specific context, such as bars and parties.

In the next section, some general findings of this research are shown. These included determining overall alcohol consumption on the university campus and identifying some characteristics shared by both cultures and genders.

## **5.2 The University Student Drinker: Contrast Between the Sense of Self-Control of University Students Vs. the Normative Drinking Culture on Campus**

### **5.2.1 The sense of self-control among university students**

University students display a marked degree of self-management; they believe that they are at low risk for getting into hazardous situations. This may result from the high degree of self-control cultivated throughout their school years and/or family values. Students have a high regard for their own safety. Most of the participants stated that they “have a plan” before drinking, and said that they only drink alcohol when “there is nothing important to do the next day.” For example, Rose, a first-year female student who originally from China and immigrated to Canada when she was 12 and is an infrequent drinker, liked to be in control:

I am not against alcohol, but I would only drink to the amount that I know I need to stop. I like to be in control and I feel more stressed if I get out of control . . . I would like to drink (alcohol) in a place where I feel more comfortable, with people I know, for example, in a close friend’s house, or in my house. So that I know they won’t dismiss me, or something.

Nicole, a female third-year Western student, also felt that, “You have to protect your safety when you are there (in bars); you should have a plan. You should plan your arrival there and make sure you have friends with you.”

Some students attach great importance to their education and this works as a protective factor against problematic drinking. University students want to “be responsible” to themselves, and “really think of their school as important.” They do not go to drinking parties very often, because they do not have a lot of time for partying. In fact, most students at university do not consume excessive amounts of alcohol. As suggested by Health Canada (2011), only 18 percent of youth reported drinking dangerously. And in a sample of university students, 70 percent of

students do not binge drink (Knight et al., 2002; Pearson, D'Lima, & Kelley, 2011). Kate, a female Western student, responded:

For me, I do not drink that much; I am really busy with school. I came here because it is a better school than back home. I am a science major so I have a lot of work in labs and classes and a lot of homework. So it has been keeping me busy. I have very little time for myself, during the week; I have two hours a day maybe; other than that, I am doing homework, in the lab, or meeting with someone at school. On the weekends, I have a little bit more time, maybe like five or six hours. But most of the time, it is just strictly school. I usually do not have time to slow down, so I choose not to drink.

However, the high sense of self-management applies both ways. As Huerta and Borgonovi (2010) indicated in their work, the idea of self-control may not decrease alcohol consumption of university students all the time; on the contrary, it can lead university students to have more frequent and possibly heavier drinking sessions. Once habitual drinkers feel confident in their grades, there may find no reason to dislike or stop drinking. For example, Katrina, a female third-year Western student, who drank an average of 10 standard drinks per occasion, said:

I was able to keep up my grades, so I had no reason to not like it (drinking alcohol). But I know a lot of people that because of that they failed at university. So I think it depends. For me, I like it just because I was able to keep up my grades and everything else. But I know if a lot of people look back, they will probably hate it. For me, if I know I have a paper due tomorrow, I would not let myself leave my room until I finish that paper. Whereas other people write a couple of sentences and go do this and go do that, so they did not get anything done. For finals I would not study for long, but the day before the final, I spent from eight in the morning until eight at night just studying, and that would be enough for me. I think it is just my study methods.

To some extent, the sense of self-management of university students prevents them from getting into hazardous situations. But the normative drinking culture on the university campus may decrease the protective work accomplished by their sense of self-management.

### **5.2.2 Normative drinking and living in residence**

All participants were aware of the culture of drinking in Canada. They think “it is common for people to have a beer while watching hockey” or “have a glass of wine during dinner.” University students tend to be aware of the wide acceptance of drinking alcohol among their peers. As Kong and Bergman (2010) indicated, positive expectations regarding the effects of alcohol among university students are a reflection of the culture of emerging adults that normalizes heavy and frequent drinking. Students see going to an alcohol-oriented party as an important part of their social life. Tyler, a female Western student in her second year, felt this

way:

Drinking is viewed as normal in Canada. People have been drinking for a long time in Western society. People would have one glass of alcohol at dinner. And there are always drinking parties for my age. It is quite normal especially in university and high school.

Emily, a female second-year student from Canada expressed a similar view of the wide acceptance of drinking in Canada:

Most people, especially at my age, see alcohol as an important social thing. Very few people do not think of going out for a beer. So most people see some alcohol-oriented parties as important social life in Canada.

Besides this, the university campus becomes an incubator of drinking culture and group norms, and binge drinking is widely accepted by students. As suggested in the literature previously referred to, student identity influences the behaviour of university students through the mediating role of group norms. Individuals will be more likely to engage in a particular behaviour if it is in accordance with the norms of a behaviourally relevant group with whom they strongly identify (Johnston & White, 2003). That is, being a university student means to behave in accordance with normative drinking behaviour. As Emily, a female second-year Western student responded: “to be on campus is to go to bars.” University students believe that there are drinking norms on campus and that everyone else on campus conforms to those norms. Emily said:

[Drinking] is quite a large part of our culture; people in college get the idea that drinking is the only social thing to do. The only social thing available for our age is to go out to a bar or a nightclub on the weekend. And people have this idea too that alcohol will [relieve their inhibitions] and help them to have a lot more fun.

Heavy and frequent drinking is normalized at the university, especially in university residences. In the present research, the participants identified frequent-heavy drinking and infrequent-heavy drinking. On campus, students may overestimate the drinking behaviour of others. The normative perceptions of others’ drinking behaviour is strongly related to students’ own drinking patterns. Considerable research has shown that university students tend to overestimate the frequency and quantity of alcohol consumed by their peers, and such overestimation is related to their own heavy and frequent alcohol consumption (Perkins, 2002; Rinker & Neighbors, 2013).

Previous research suggests that the degree of overestimation varies by “the specificity of the

normative referent” (Rinker & Neighbors, 2013, p. 2919). Perceived drinking norms are more significant in campus residences and make excessive alcohol use appear common and acceptable to students who live in them (Borsari & Carey, 2001). Owing to the wide awareness of binge drinking behaviour in the university residence, students living in campus residences tend to “misperceive drinking behaviour to be more extreme or frequent than it actually is” (Dams-O’Connor, Martin, & Martens, 2007, p. 2659) and are, thus, more likely to conform to the perceived drinking norm and drink excessively themselves. For example, Katrina, a female, third-year Western student, shared her drinking experience in the university residence.

In the second year, I lived in residence and there is a huge culture of drinking. Since you lived in the residence, you kind of not worry about coming back home or doing whatever. So it is just easier to come from class and drink. A lot of people will come to class drunk, and at night people party in their rooms. In the first semester, I drank three times a week, and in second semester four or five times a week . . . It is so accepted and we just see people with a beer in the morning just walking around on campus. Before dinner we just hang out in someone’s room and drink. Then go to dinner and drink.

This account parallels study showing that students living in residence tend to drink more, and more often engage in binge drinking than those living with their parents (Martin & Hoffman, 1993; Valliant & Scanlan, 1996). The change in living circumstances and drinking norms on campus contribute to the widespread use of alcohol among university students. Once a student is living out of residence, the amount and frequency of drinking alcohol decreases, because they are away from these shared values. Daisy, a female, second-year international student from New Zealand, who used to drink “quite a few” in residence, decreased her alcohol consumption when she moved out of residence. She said:

Last year I lived in residence and I drank once a week. I do not know how many drinks per occasion. Quite a few, maybe five to seven per occasion. [Researcher: Did you get drunk?] Yes, I drank a lot of (alcohol) last year, but this year, not. I didn’t get drunk last year. [Researcher: Why was there a change?] I think [because] I wasn’t living in residence any more. It helps a lot. And I never drank before. It is not really who I am to drink, but just because of the circumstances, I did. [Researcher: Why did living in residence make you drink?] Because a lot of students were living there, and almost everyone drank during the weekend. I think people do it just because it is the kind of culture.

Being a university student implies both ways. The high sense of self-management cultivated through education lowers the risk of getting into hazard situations. But the normalized drinking

attached to student identity decreases the protective effect of students' sense of self-control, especially in residence. Although a normative drinking culture exists frequently in the Western universities, why do some university students use alcohol responsibly, while others use it problematically? The next section addresses question from the perspective of drinking attitudes and motives of university students.

### **5.3 Why Students Drink (or Not), Viewed from the Perspective of Drinking Attitudes**

Drinking alcohol means different things to different students. Some students drink moderately, while others drink to get drunk. Why does the amount of alcohol use vary from zero to 18 standard drinks per occasion? Here I aim to answer this question by linking it to individuals' motives for drinking and attitudes.

Attitudes are generally considered to be important determinants of behavioural intent (Cleveland et al., 2013; van der Zwaluw, Kleinjan, Lemmers, Spijkerman, & Engels, 2013). An individual's intention to engage in a particular behaviour is related to his or her attitude, that is, to whether they have an overall positive or negative evaluation of that behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). There are several studies showing that attitudes are strong predictors of university students' alcohol use. Positive attitudes regarding alcohol correlate with higher levels of alcohol consumption (Cleveland et al., 2013; van der Zwaluw et al., 2013).

In this research, I witnessed two basic attitudes towards alcohol consumption, shared by both alcohol users and nonusers alike. Nondrinkers showed a negative view about alcohol use, while alcohol users were more positive about it, believing that alcohol could be harmless when used responsibly. The research also found that participants' attitudes to alcohol closely resembled their parents' and friends' views.

The most common view about alcohol use, as expressed by alcohol users in this research, is that it is all right in moderation. Kate, a Western female student, who drank from none to one standard drink per week and two or three standard drinks per occasion, stated:

It is good in moderation, but if you are drinking all the time, it is not good . . . [It will harm your] brain development, your body, and basically it will harm your attitude and judgment. If you are always drinking and you are always drunk, you probably do not have the best health. You will not be able to concentrate; you will be distracted.

Contrary to students' belief that drinking in moderation can be acceptable an article published in 2015 indicated that women drinking as little as one drink a day can increase the risk of breast cancer by 7 to 12 percent, because alcohol consumption causes increased oestrogen production, which in turn increases the risk of causing breast cancer (Cao et al., 2015; Daily Mirror, London, England, 2015).

Both moderate and heavy drinkers hold the idea that "drinking can be acceptable in moderation". For example, Katrina, a female, third-year Western student, who had an average of ten standard drinks per occasion, held a similar view. She reported, "It is good if you use it responsibly. It is very easy to lose [control] and drink too much or become an alcoholic."

The significance of binge drinking remains unclear for some students, especially those who drink heavily but not frequently. For these drinkers, binge drinking on a monthly basis is not considered a problem. Katrina expressed this idea:

It is fine as long as you do not abuse it, like binge drinking. [Researcher: Do you and your friends binge drink?] I suppose so, but I mean excessive binge drinking. If you drink a lot one night in two weeks, it is not that bad. Some people do it three times a week, and that is a problem.

Evidence also exists that a favourable attitude towards high-risk drinking is related to excessive alcohol use among university students (Cleveland et al., 2013; Stone et al., 2012). However, unlike the positive view of alcohol users, some non-drinkers reported that they were against alcohol use for themselves. They also said that if they had the chance, they would stop others from drinking alcohol too, because they could see the health risks and other disadvantages connected with binge drinking. For example, Lisa, a female international student from Vietnam, did not like drinking alcohol and reported trying to avoid drinking it:

I do not like it (drinking alcohol). It is something that I try most to avoid because I once saw a drunk person and I do not want to be like that. I have a judgment against people who drink alcohol. They are not good students, and it is not the right thing to do, even if they drink a moderate amount of alcohol.

Alice, a second-year female student from Bangladesh, who had not drunk alcohol in the past and said she did not intend to drink in the future, said:

I cannot really stop people from drinking, because there is a huge community of people who actually do it. But if I have a chance, I will probably try to stop people from doing it. Because there are so many health risks and disadvantages; it is an addiction, and there is always the worry [that people are going to] drink and drive.

To some extent, a negative attitude towards the use of alcohol may prevent students from drinking. However, given the common notion that it is fine in moderation, why do some students not drink moderately? Why do they sometimes want to drink more than they plan to? This may result from the fact that an individual's intentions about drinking relate not only to their attitude to alcohol, but to their motives.

#### **5.4 Why Some Students Drink (or Not), Viewed from the Perspective of Motives**

Motives for drinking, often related to the desired outcome of alcohol use, may explain why people drink alcohol (Stappenbeck, Bedard-Gilligan, Lee, & Kaysen, 2013). Such motives can be to celebrate, to be sociable, to have a good time, or to cope or escape from unpleasant emotions. Values such as coping, social conformity, and enhancement all play a role in motivating individuals to drink (Cooper, 1994). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the motives for drinking are pivotal in shaping the drinking behaviour of university students (Cooper, 1994; Kong & Bergman, 2010; Wall et al., 2000).

##### **5.4.1 Social and enhancement motives are the most common**

Although motivation is regarded as an individual factor linking drinking behaviour among university students, environmental and contextual influences on alcohol use are important social factors (LaBrie, Hummer, Pedersen, Lac, & Chithambo, 2012). Social and enhancement motives are closely related to the context of binge drinking in the university. Consistent with the previous literature, this research found that, as compared with conformity and coping motives, social and enhancement motives were pivotal when it comes to motivating university students to drink (Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, & Engels, 2005). Only a few students reported coping motives in this research. This may be because of the greater importance of social motives for problematic drinking in this specific age group (Kong & Bergman, 2010).

Some students valued the enhancement aspect of drinking alcohol, reporting that they liked the feeling of “getting high” or simply liked the taste of alcohol. For example, Yang, a female international graduate student from China, felt:

Alcohol gives people fun; it relaxes people. I feel relaxed and a kind of high and I like that feeling. When we are sober, we have to obey orders, but with the help of alcohol, these orders disappear and we are able to do what we really want; as I said, alcohol helps us to be brave.

Besides enhancement seeking, university students also drink to socialize. Fifteen out of 18

drinkers in this research commented that they drank to have fun when they were hanging out with friends. Most drinkers value the socialization aspect of drinking alcohol. Nicole, a female, third-year Western student, valued the social aspect of drinking. She reported that for her drinking was a social thing:

Drinking [alcohol] is just a social thing for me. In our college we usually have a big event after the exams and we go out and celebrate together, just like a common social thing to do . . . I drink to be social. I would just drink water when I am alone and I do not drink with just one or two friends, we will just have a coffee. I usually drink with a group of people, like my college.

#### **5.4.2 Cultural variation in the coping and conformity motives for using alcohol**

Drinking to avoid depression or anxiety (seen as coping) and to attain social approval (seen as conformity) showed less significant among university students. More than 80 percent of students reported that drinking alcohol was not a way they used to relieve stress. Turning to alcohol was not helpful, and there were better ways to relieve stress, such as “taking a nap, doing exercise, or shopping.” When asked about the way to relieve stress, John, a male, first-year student from England, said:

I will take a break from what I was doing, watch TV, or go to the gym and I will lose that stress; but I won't drink to relieve stress. It never helps. It does not fix anything in the long run. You might get drunk at night in a bar, but the next day, it is still there. When I am upset, I generally talk to someone about what has made me sad. I try to solve that, but again not by drinking.

Nicole, a female, third-year Western student, expressed a similar opinion:

When I feel stressed, I usually call a friend or go for a walk. Alcohol is not a coping skill for me, as I know it does not help. And obviously as a nurse we educate others how to be positive and use coping skills. You want to be an example and you know the physiological effects.

Although 80 percent of students in the sample reported that they did not use alcohol to relieve stress, a small number of students used alcohol as a coping strategy. Three out of 21 students in the sample reported drinking to relieve stress or to help them get to sleep. Motives for drinking seemed to vary slightly between people from different cultural backgrounds. Studies reveal that motives for drinking are culturally embedded. The drinking culture in a particular country affects ethnic groups and their motives for drinking (Kuntsche et al., 2005). Students of Western origin tend to drink for the sake of socializing or enhancement. But some international students, especially students of Chinese origin, drink for coping or conformity.



In some cases, an individual's reasons for drinking are culture specific. Shao (a male, first-year Chinese student) reported that "if Chinese are drinking, they may feel said or lonely, because they don't normally drink; if they drinking, there have to be some special reasons." This does not mean that they do not drink in order to socialize, but compared with Western students, who seldom drink for coping and conformity, students of Asian background are more likely to drink in order to cope, especially when they drink with close friends or alone. Allen, a first-year Chinese male student, believed that the reason for students to over-consume alcohol might be that they "fail a final or midterm exam, broke up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or are homesick." He pointed out:

For me, the only reason to get drunk is failing the final or midterm exam. It is so bad and then I want to get drunk. I just want to forget that. The day I wake up, it does not change. I have to study . . . If I drink I drink a lot. I would say a lot of things that I do not want other people to know. For example, I would say, "oh, I failed the midterm exam." If the people do not know you, they do not care if you failed the exam. But if it is your friend, they will tell you what should you do next time . . . Drinking makes me feel relaxed and such that I want to share something with my friends. And I feel good after sharing this with my friends and getting support from them. The point is not to get advice from them, but the talk itself and getting the things off my chest makes me comfortable.

Drinking is a multidimensional phenomenon, and likely to be influenced by a wide range of factors. Gire (2002) suggested that the effect culture has on the coping motive is stronger than its effect on enhancement or social motives. That is why drinkers from both Asian and Western cultural backgrounds reported social benefits and enhancement, while Asian students in this research more often reported the coping motive. International students tended to drink alcohol in order to cope with problems, because they might not have alternatives for dealing with their difficulties.

Some students use alcohol as a "sleeping pill" and find that when they are too stressed to get to sleep, a little bit of alcohol makes them sleep better. Mia, a female from China, reported:

I have class from Monday to Friday, and I have to work on weekends. I do not have a day off. If I have a day off, I just stay at home. In my case, I have to keep a high average in nursing, say 79. I feel overwhelmed. [Researcher: Does drinking help you to relieve stress?] A little. I do have wine in my fridge. And I find that a little alcohol helps me to sleep well. I will feel a little bit lighter and then go to bed. In the next day when I wake up, everything turns normal. I would only take alcohol before I go to bed. I am not the kind of people who gets drunk easily, but I still want to be reasonable.

The cultural difference is revealed not only in the coping motive, but also in the conformity motive. In Western society, drinking alcohol is a personal choice. The decision by Western youth to drink alcohol is influenced by individual and interpersonal risk factors (Ham & Hope, 2003). My research found that people of Chinese culture, by contrast, were more likely to be pushed to drink. They drink in order to maintain good relationships and a social network with others. Mia recalled her experiences in China, reporting:

My mom works for the government in China, and she drinks a lot. But I don't like that kind of culture, where you have to get drunk on business occasions. In China, when you are at the table, you are not able to say no, even with your schoolmates and at school parties.

On campus, students drink alcohol in order to be popular and maintain good relationships with other students and/or the faculty. Mia said:

If you want to be popular you have to drink. Here it is more reasonable, as far as I know . . . I finished my accounting degree in China. I used to be the head of a dance club in my university [in China]. We had a lot of activities, such as holding events and dance parties for the students and club members. For those people that you have to communicate with and get support from, like the adviser or supervisor of the club, you have to buy their dinner and drinks. It was very common in my university. Even though we are not in the [wider] society, we still practice that culture. [Researcher: What if you said no?] If you said no, they would not invite you the next time. You will lose some friends. And they will find that you are not fine or not popular. At that time, being popular really meant something to me. Once you get it, you don't want to let it [popularity] go. [Researcher: What did you get from being popular?] More funding for my club and the party from the student union.

People who lived in Canada as well as in their country of origin were aware of the different views held in these two cultures. Students who came from China felt that they were more comfortable with the drinking culture in Western society. Rose, a female first-year student and an infrequent drinker, who immigrated to Canada when she was 12 years old, commented: "Drinking in China is something you have to do; at some events where you drink a lot, it's more like a duty; you have to drink. Here in Canada, it is more for enjoyment, and in China it is more for your job and status, that kind of thing."

Shao, a first-year, male student from China, agreed, saying:

If you have a business discussion, people will have dinner and get together. They prefer to drink expensive alcohol to get the business done. I went to some business dinners with my father. They had to get drunk in order to have it done . . . Here, they don't care much if you don't drink on a given occasion. It is different from where I

come from. Here it is more casual. As I said, it is a personal choice here. If you don't drink, they will accept it and don't think you don't have a good relationship with them. In China, at a dinner party, everyone should drink alcohol. And I would get stressed.

This research found that social and enhancement motives were pivotal factors for university students to drink alcohol. Coping and conformity motives showed less significance among university students. No substantial gender difference in motives for drinking was found in this research. The findings in the previous literature, that women tended to drink alcohol because of emotional depression (Swanson et al., 2004), did not emerge in this research. That may be because the target population of this research consisted of young university students, who might not suffer frequent emotional depression and/or could find an alternative way to respond to depression, such as exercising.

Although there was not much variation by gender, the motives for drinking seemed to vary slightly between people from different cultural backgrounds. Students of Western origin tended to drink for the sake of socializing or enhancement, while some of the students of Chinese origin drank for coping or conformity. Moreover, in Western society, drinking alcohol was a personal choice. The decision by Western youth to drink alcohol is influenced by individual and interpersonal risk factors (Ham & Hope, 2003), while in Chinese culture, people drink to maintain good relationships and in their social networks.

Previous literature on binge drinking among Western university students suggested that although at a lower priority, drinking for coping still exists (Pedersen, 2013; Robinson et al., 2012). For example, a report shared by What's Your Cap indicated that at the U of S, students often drank to relieve pressure in their personal lives, such as when schoolwork was a burden and when preparing for exams. A lot of pressure to drink might occur if a regular drinker chose not to drink for a night (Robinson et al., 2012). Conformity is another minor but persistent motive of drinking. For many first year students, alcohol was used to achieve social goals in university such as to fit in, achieve lasting friendship, and earn peer admiration (Martinez, Steinley, & Sher, 2010; Patrick et al., 2011).

The culturally varied motives of drinking alcohol are not entirely supported by the existing literature. Two possible reasons account for this gap. First, the findings might be skewed due to limited sample size. Second, although the previous literature discloses the motives for drinking in Western universities, it seldom takes into consideration the influence of people's cultural

background. This includes the cultural background of university students as influencing their motives for drinking. Thus, little literature on the relationship between individuals' motives for drinking and their cultural background can be referred to.

#### **5.4.3 Motives for drinking as they relate to students' drinking behaviour**

Consistent with the previous literature, this research found that students' motives for drinking influence their drinking patterns, especially the amount and frequency of alcohol intake. "Drinking is motivated by different needs . . . [and] specific drinking motives are associated with a unique pattern of precursors" (Kuntsche et al., 2005, p. 842). Social motives are more related to frequent, but moderate, drinking. Participants who drank to socialize did not drink excessively on a single occasion; instead, they would have one or two drinks per occasion, consistent with the findings of Kuntsche et al. (2005) and Cooper (1994) that university students who drank to be sociable were less likely to consume alcohol excessively than those who drank for enhancement or coping motives. Cooper (1994) also found that although those who drank for social motives drank more frequently, out of the desire to socialize in drinking situations, they might not drink large quantities per occasion.

Unlike social motives, the enhancement motive is more related to frequent, heavy drinking. Drinking in order to get drunk or high correlates with enhancement motive scales in existing studies. Students who drink for the sake of getting intoxicated may need more alcohol to exceed their tolerance level. Katrina, a Western third-year female student, who drinks ten standard drinks per occasion said:

I get drunk on purpose. When I am at a party, you just drink enough to get drunk.  
[Researcher: Why?] It's fine if everyone else is [doing the same thing]. You are with your friends. I just like the feeling of getting drunk, loosening up, and you are with your friends.

As suggested by Kuntsche and colleagues (2005), "if drinking to get drunk or 'to feel the effects of alcohol' is included in enhancement scales, then enhancement motives are likely to be associated with heavy drinking" (p. 854). Elliot, a male, 21 year-old international student from England, agreed, saying:

Drinking is so fun for some reason. I don't really know why but I think the time is enjoyable, the feeling of being drunk at that time is quite fun. You can regret afterwards. I think it is quite often you might end up with getting more drunk than you planned on I guess, because your decision making is a lot worse once you've had one or two beers; you are more likely to have more afterwards because you don't make as

wise decisions as before. I have to say it is enjoyable, I guess. I mean it is pretty rare I get really drunk. I haven't done it very often, but most of the time it really fun.

Although enhancement motives were found to correlate more with overconsumption of alcohol in this research, this does not mean that social drinkers do not get drunk. Social drinking might sometimes lead to getting drunk because of its social aspect. Binge drinking parties are examples of such social drinking. Students who drink for social reasons may be easily affected by the people around them. They may want to “catch up” with others and play drinking games with the people they socialize with.

In spite of the impact of drinking attitudes and motives on students' drinking behaviour, there are other factors that contribute to individuals' consumption of alcohol. Problematic drinking behaviours are manifested differently according to each individual's cultural background and gender, as found in this research. Sixty-six percent (four out of six) of Western women and 60 percent (three out of five) of Western men in this research drank in excess of the low-risk drinking guidelines, whereas only one male of Asian origin drank in excess of the guidelines. Women of Asian origin in my sample chose to drink within the low-risk drinking guidelines or chose not to drink. Given the differences in alcohol consumption between cultural backgrounds and between men and women of same cultural background, the researcher wanted to find out why such differences existed. According to social identity theory, the effect of normative drinking on campus is moderated by how students view themselves as members of their social and gender group. This may lead to a deeper discussion of the role of group identity and social expectation.

## **5.5 Cultural Identity**

### **5.5.1 Norms against alcohol use in Asian culture**

An individual's intention to engage in a given behaviour is related to norms and expectations. In the literature, the perception of the group norm was seen as having more impact in determining a person's intentions than that individual's attitudes (Johnston & White, 2003). According to social identity/self-categorization theories, the norms and expectations of a specific social group, such as female and Asian, can predict people's intentions to drink alcohol, especially for those who are strongly attached to the social group.

In Asian culture, emphasis on the values of responsibility, interdependence, moderation, and restraint (Hong et al., 2011) has a strong impact on the drinking attitudes of students of

Asian origin. Students' behaviour is culturally embedded and influenced by their family members and cultural norms. As suggested by LaBrie, Lac, Kenney, and Mirza (2011), Asian cultural norms emphasize avoidance of "losing face or negative evaluation from others," and thus prevent individuals from excessive drinking (LaBrie et al., 2011, p. 358). When asked whether her cultural identity influenced her view of alcohol use, Jasmine, a female international student, 20 years old, from India, said:

Being an Indian indirectly affects my decisions. I am not religious, but I am still Indian. I was still brought up in that kind of society. So that does affect my view of doing things. In our society, we are supposed to be doing everything in a certain age, when we are responsible, and when we are on our own feet. Here people have been on their feet since 16 and 17; they are working part-time since they were 16. In our society, we are not working until we finish our undergraduate study, that is somewhere around 23. Until then, you are living with your parents, so you basically obey their wishes and comply with them. In India, we are supposed to be very close with family. Family is an important social unit. You live with your family. You are supposed to obey your parents, your grandparents and other relatives. You are supposed to be respectful and obedience to anyone who is older than you. You believe that she knows better than you do just because she is older. So there are differences in the way things are done here and back home. I have been in Canada for a year, so I'm still learning how things are done here.

Some international students do not drink alcohol because of their attachment to their culture of origin, and the fact that they did not have a normative culture of drinking at home. Such students have not become fully attached to their identity as a university student in the West, where drinking alcohol is normative.

Another major aspect of Asian culture is the importance of strong family ties. The norms and values against alcohol use are reinforced through the process of family connection and obedience to older family members. Consistent with the findings of previous literature, parental influence remains strong for young adults who go to university. Students who maintain strong family ties showed a lower tendency towards drunkenness in university (Cail & LaBrie, 2010; Cleveland et al., 2013). Alice, a female international student from Bangladesh in her second year, and who came to U of S in her first year, said:

I never drink alcohol, because I am concerned for my family. They don't allow me to go to drinking parties. In Bangladesh, if someone is taking drugs, they are considered a bad person. This affects everything: their future as well as their studies. In my country, we are in a very close environment; we are very protected by our parents and our family; we are bound by our culture. They do not let us go out much and our parents

don't allow us to do a lot of things, like staying out very late at night or stay over [with other people]. Wherever we go, we should inform them; usually it is the case that our parents keep a check on us . . . There is a thing inside me that keeps me away from [drinking alcohol]. I was brought up in a very prescriptive environment, so I am very protected, and I was not allowed to do anything that is wrong, like going randomly everywhere without letting my parents know. I was not allowed to do any of these things. My family values have a strict hold on me, and it affects me here. I won't do anything that is wrong (related to drugs, partying too much), because of my family values inside on me. I was brought up that way. I know I will always have the fear that maybe they will find out something . . . They sent me here for a reason. They sent me here to study. That is what I should be doing and that is what my focus should be. I won't do anything that makes them sad or disappointed in me.

In this research, it was evident that Western parents did not hold an attitude of abstinence and tended to be more open-minded and have more positive attitudes if their children use alcohol in moderation.

Despite being attached to one's cultural identity, one's religious group identity was also found to be a protective factor against binge drinking at university.

### **5.5.2 Religion as a protection against problematic drinking**

Religious commitment is found to be a protective factor against alcohol use for students from both Asian and Western culture. Among the five participants who identified them as religious, four felt that their morality guided them, such that they would not drink alcohol or use it in an abusive way. This parallels the findings of Stone and colleagues (2012) showing that religious commitment was related to a low risk of frequent drinking, even for students who leave their parents' home and go to university (Stone et al., 2012).

In addition, more proscriptive religions may play a significant role in preventing individuals from problematic drinking. For example, Muslim students may be shielded from the temptation to try alcohol. Alice, the female second-year student from Bangladesh, identified herself as a Muslim and said:

I never drink alcohol, because I am a religious Muslim. So I am actually not allowed to drink. My religion prohibits drinking alcohol... mainly because of the health concerns, because anything addictive is really bad for your health. So anything addictive is prohibitive in our religion, even smoking.

One possible explanation of this scenario is that proscriptive religions may be associated with higher levels of disapproval, thus predicting lower levels of alcohol use (Vaughan, de Dios, Steinfeldt & Kratz, 2011).

Involvement in less proscriptive religions such as Catholicism and other forms of Christianity can also protect individuals from alcohol-related problems such as problematic drinking, even for an occasional drinker. Studies have looked at the interrelationships between religiousness and alcohol consumption and some have found that “religion represents an important developmental context and the extent to which adolescents internalize the values of the context may influence alcohol use in both direct and indirect ways” (Vaughan et al., 2011, p. 550). It protects students from excessive alcohol use not only by influencing their adoption of a negative attitude towards the use of alcohol, but also by linking individuals with their moral commitment and compelling them to think about responsibility. Elliot, a 21-year-old male international student from England, who drank three or four standard drinks per week said: “I became a Christian last year. I drink less now. I suppose I am being more responsible. It’s a motivation for me to be conscious.” Emily, a female, second-year student from Canada, agreed that religion makes her more responsible and rational:

I am Catholic, so I am inclined not to get drunk. And I think it is not acceptable, because you lose rational control of yourself and that’s not a good position to be in. You need to be responsible for your actions and if you’re drunk, you cannot be (responsible). For me, I understand the idea that drinking in excess is wrong, because it is hard on your body and it inhabits your ability to think rationally, and it is a dangerous place to put yourself in. So based on that, I am inclined not to drink. My Catholic friends do not drink at all, because it contradicts the Bible.

Individuals internalize the values, such as responsibility, rationality, and virtue represented by their religion, and therefore choose not to use alcohol in a problematic way. For example, Nicole, a female, third-year Western student, also found religion to be a positive thing:

I am religious, so I think I should not drink. I am Christian, but I think I should follow better and should not drink. My religion and my morality teach that I feel myself a better person if I am in control of myself. Religion is a positive thing. As you get older, you kind of start to think about your morals. So that is the kind of direction I am going, caring more about my personal morals, rather than the group mentality of being a young 19-year-old.

To summarize, religious commitment protects individuals from problematic drinking by developing in the disapproving attitudes towards alcohol use (Vaughan et al., 2011). Besides this, religiousness protects students from excessive alcohol use by impelling them to think about virtues such as responsibility. In addition, it plays an even more significant role for individuals in cases where there are stronger religious proscriptions.



## **5.6 Gender Identity**

### **5.6.1 Being female and using alcohol**

Feminine gender identity has been found to serve as a deterrent for deviant behaviour among university students (Nofziger, 2010). Although cultures vary, gender identity and the cultural understanding of the social expectations of female influence women's attitudes towards alcohol consumption. In this research, gender identity was not only the individual's self-identification as male or female, but also the individual woman's internalization of gender roles (Krais, 2006) and internalization of norms and values attached to gender. Individuals tend to behave according to the socially defined characteristics that are ascribed to their gender.

Social role theory provides an important explanation of gendered behaviour, by discussing why gender stereotypes are perpetuated (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Gender role is conceived of as a set of behavioural expectations; for example, men as breadwinners are encouraged to value individualistic assertiveness and ambition, while women as caregivers are seen as more likely to express gentleness, affection, passivity, and dependence (Christie-Mizell & Peralta, 2009). Individuals who internalize traditional gender role attitudes tend to be motivated to conform to gender norms and behavioural expectations (Krais, 2006).

Social role theory proposes that one of the reasons why women and men conform to gender stereotypes is because the "different roles that they perform place different social demands upon them" (Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, & Madon, 2003, p. 520). As has been found in this research, women are expected to be ladylike, caregivers, and should not "ruin their reputation" (as reported by Lisa, a female international student from Vietnam). Yang, a female international graduate student from China, reported:

I feel okay if boys drink frequently and get drunk. But if girls always get drunk and crazy, it is kind of weird to me. From a very traditional Chinese view, girls should be more obedient and act like a lady, [whereas] boys can do whatever they like, including some crazy things.

Acting in accordance with social roles requires both genders to understand the different expectations and skills associated with their social roles. Gender socialization involves the internalization of ideas about appropriate behaviour. And these ideas are more restrictive of women's behaviour. Some students adhered to a double standard when it came to gender and alcohol consumption. From their point of view, it was more acceptable for a man to drink or get drunk, and they believed that being drunk in public areas was more likely to embarrass women

than men. Katrina, a female, third-year Western student reported:

If you go to a bar and sometimes see a girl that is super drunk, you will probably think: “oh, that must be embarrassing for her!” She is embarrassing herself...but if it’s a guy starting a fight [it’s not the same]. So it is more embarrassing for a girl to get drunk. [Researcher: Why?] I think it is not ladylike to be like drunk. It is not proper...whereas for guys, it is more acceptable for them.

Women are expected to be more sensitive than men, and gender role attitudes indicate that they should be helped and protected if in trouble. Emily, a female, second-year student from Canada, commented:

If I saw a drunken girl in the bar, I would feel pretty sorry for her. Someone should call a cab for her or something. Some may shake their heads that she does not know her limits. If I saw a guy (get drunk), I will have less sympathy for him. There is an idea that men should know their tolerance of alcohol; they should be able to handle themselves and take care of themselves. Men in general are less sensitive to each other. For them, it is funny that someone does not know his limits. Girls are more caring and I do not think that men like to make fun of women when they are completely wasted.

Women who internalize such traditional gender role attitudes tend to drink less alcohol because they do not want to embarrass themselves and damage their reputation. The internalization of gender roles and expectations provides an explanation of why alcohol consumption varies by gender. But this may not fully explain why female students from different cultural backgrounds tended to have different drinking patterns. This thought led me to discuss the coexistence of culture and gender roles.

### **5.6.2 The interplay of gender and culture habitus**

Gender roles coexist with culture in a symbolic relationship (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Since they are a cultural and social creation, there are variations in the magnitude of differences in gender roles and expectations. For example, unlike the exaggerated gender role in Asian culture, gender roles in Western culture may be subtler. Therefore, gender identity might be a strong protective factor for women of Eastern origin, but not so strong in Western culture. Eighty percent of participants from Asian origin in this study, regardless of gender, believed that in their culture women would be judged harshly if they got drunk.

Thus, as seen in their discourse and responses, traditional gender roles and expectations were more evident among Asian students. Although it may vary by subgroups in Asian culture, social acceptance of a girl’s drinking was lower in Asian society generally in comparison to Western society. Women who drink or get drunk might be judged harshly and stereotyped, and

drinking is categorically forbidden for women in some Eastern cultures. For example, Jasmine, a female second-year international student from India, responded:

I am a girl and I should obey norms. There have always been gender differences in my culture. We follow Hinduism in our country. The male gods are in a higher position than the female gods. From that, it follows that women are supposed to take care of the home and men are supposed to run the world... so that division is evident everywhere. Men go out and make money, and so they go out and drink. Women are not supposed to do it (drink alcohol).

The clear division of labour between men and women in some Asian culture may contribute to the low acceptance of females' consumption of alcohol. However, in other Asian countries where the division of labour may not be as clear as it used to be, women in the labour market especially business women have to drink alcohol to maintain good relationships with their partners and to get their contract signed. Women in the workplace are faced stress from work and the possible damage to their health caused by the overconsumption of alcohol.

"Girls are going to be wives and mothers in the future," said Lisa, a female international students from Vietnam, "and drinking alcohol is not good for them." In some Asian society, women would be judged harshly if they drank alcohol, and the cost of thus ruining their reputation was high—it might influence their marriage in the future. So Asian parents will protect their daughters from damage to their reputation. Lisa, a female international student from Vietnam offered the following:

In my country, most young people drink to show off. But girls [must] have discipline. Girls cannot do whatever they want, because they have a reputation to be maintained. You want to show your best side to others . . . Girls will be judged if they get drunk. Girls do not want to lose their reputation. If parents see girls drunk, these girls will not easily get married and settle down. In my mother's generation, they had to take care of the family, pick up kids, and go to the supermarket. I have not seen any mother drinking alcohol. As a wife, it is not right for you to go out and drink with friends. You may drink with your husband at home. But being a wife and a mother, you have responsibilities, and [therefore] you won't drink alcohol. Another reason is that the parents want to keep the girl's reputation. They want to restrict and protect them. In my culture, only easy girls would drink. Girls will be severely judged if they drink frequently.

However, it is not only women who obey the norms that women should not drink as men do; some male participants of Asian origin hold the same opinion. Wilson, a male international student, said:

In China there is a general belief that women should not drink. This attitude is probably very ancient, because men have to work and make money. Drinking alcohol is a good way to bond with each other emotionally and financially. In the past I think alcohol was treated as valuable and very difficult to get. And there is a long tradition of gender inequality in China, so women would not have had the chance to get alcohol.

Culture influences the socialization of gender roles (Theran, 2009). Women in Asian cultures encounter social pressures to internalize the *good woman* stereotype, which emphasizes caring and relatedness, even if it requires self-sacrifice (Theran, 2009, p. 1028). Asian culture also emphasizes female obedience. Women are more likely to internalize such social expectations and assume traditional gender roles. As such, they are less likely to do things that may in all probability damage their reputation. As drinking alcohol and getting drunk frequently may put them in precisely that danger, women of Asian origin may avoid drinking alcohol.

The impact of traditional gender roles on women in the West is weaker than that on Asian participants. Two out of six female students from Western cultures believed that there was a gender difference related to drinking in their culture. However, even when they agreed that gender did make a difference, the reason given had to do largely with physical safety and health concerns. When asked whether her gender has any influence on her alcohol consumption, Kate, a female Western student, said:

I think so, just because a lot of people see women as caretakers; so they would not drink much because they are busy taking care of someone. So they will moderate themselves a little bit more than a man. So if a man gets excessively drunk, it may be that he doesn't have anyone to take care of. But if women get drunk, there are also fears of men making advancing on women, which is part of the rape culture we experience. I think there is a limit on how much women will drink if they go out, just because of this huge background of rape culture. They do not want that to happen. A lot of sexual assaults occur when woman are drunk.

Tyler, a second-year female Western student agreed:

Women are introduced to alcohol at the same age, so it's pretty much the same; men are not necessarily encouraged to drink more, but they are less *discouraged* from drinking by their parents, [who might be] more strict with a girl. They don't want your reputation to be damaged; it's more dangerous for girls to get that drunk because guys will take advantage of them . . . Parents have those stories in their minds.

Most participants from Western origin did not see gender differences related to drinking behaviour and attitudes. This finding was conveyed in the study done in the United States by Christie-Mizell and Peralta (2009). They suggested that the effect of traditional gender role

attitudes on female drinking behaviour had diminished in Western society (Christie-Mizell & Peralta, 2009). It is hard to avoid alcohol especially for women given the existing drinking culture in Western society. The alcohol industry, bars and restaurants, and social media are closely linked to overconsumption of alcohol (Johnston, 2013). As Johnston (2013) expressed in her book “alcohol jumps out of cupboards, into line of your vision”... people can easily see a “restaurant walled in wine, movies with up-close-and-personal drinking shots, and magazine ads” on alcohol (Johnston, 2013, p.59). Alcohol industry aims at female consumers, creating girly names such as French Rabbits, Girls’ Night Out, and MommyJuice (CBC documentary Girls’ Night Out, Feb 25, 2016) in order to appeal to female consumers. Besides the girl cocktail pushing their overconsumption of alcohol, females are also in a culture of alcohol medication (Johnston, 2013). They tend to self-medicate depression with the use of alcohol (Johnston, 2013).

The culture that supports females’ overconsumption of alcohol not only contributes to the narrowing drinking gap between men and women in Western society but also diminishes the effect of traditional gender role attitudes on women’s drinking behaviour. The present research found that more than 80 percent of students of Western origin felt that men and women drank equally. For example, Nicole, the third-year female Western student commented:

In my culture, it is pretty common for men and women to party and drink. People have more freedom to choose whatever they like, regardless of gender. In terms of amount, men are considered less manly if they cannot drink a lot. And for women, it does not really matter. Either way, I will feel the same whether it is a really drunk girl or a really drunk guy.

John, a male international student from England, did not think that there was any gender differentiation in terms of alcohol use in his English culture, especially when “liberal thinking became a mainstream thing” in his country:

Back home men and women drink equally. We drink different things, but I think there is no difference between being a man and being a woman in terms of drinking. Nowadays boys and girls drink the same amount . . . There used to be [judgment]; it was seen as acceptable for men to drink more and unacceptable for women to get drunk. But I think that has changed a lot now. It is no longer a big shock to see a woman drinking. [Researcher: And how about women getting drunk?] I think it is equal now. There is no difference between men and women when you see them drunk. I think it is more of a generational thing. It used to be shocking to see a woman drinking a lot of alcohol, but now I do not think that is particularly shocking. [Researcher: Since when?] I think [the change came] sometime in my parents’

generation, when liberal thinking become more mainstream . . . I think men and woman should drink equally. I certainly do not think that you can say men definitely should drink more and woman definitely less. Gender does not really affect it.

Gender, embedded in social expectations and norms, influences people's decision to drink. The higher levels of internalization of traditional gender roles explains the differences in alcohol use between women of Western and Asian origin. In order to protect their reputation, female students from Asian culture avoid using alcohol or getting drunk, while in Western culture, especially among young adults, people tend to see men and women in a more equal way. And owing to feminist thought, the traditional expectations of gender roles are less evident in Western society. Thus, unlike women in Asian culture, women in Western culture are less likely to be socialized to obedience and are less judged and stereotyped. Young women in Western society may not see drinking alcohol as a male thing, and feel that to judge or look down on a drunk woman constituted double standard. One possible explanation for the difference in gender role internalization in these two cultures is that the gap in gender role attitudes is decreasing in Western society; men and women are becoming more egalitarian over time (Christie-Mizell & Peralta, 2009). Women are no longer pushed to act according to conventional attitudes and are not discouraged from drinking alcohol. The coexistence of gender and culture may provide an explanation for why women from Asian cultures drink less alcohol than their Western counterparts, because the latter are not socialized in the same stereotyped way.

In summary, this chapter offers the main findings of the research. First, there exist gendered and culturally diverse patterns of university problematic drinking. Second, the drinking behaviour of university students is related to their sense of self-management and the normative drinking culture of the university. Third, students' social identities influence their attitudes to and motives for drinking and influence their drinking patterns. Fourth, student's drinking patterns are shaped by the interaction of their gender identity and cultural background. The next chapter will explore how these findings are supported by the theoretical model and suggest some implications for reducing university problematic drinking.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research was designed to identify the primary reasons for gendered and cultural patterns of university problematic drinking. By applying social identity theory and role theory, situated in relation to Bourdieu's analysis of the habitus, the study emphasized how one's social identities (gender, cultural, and student) interacted with the norms of campus drinking behaviour to influence students' attitudes towards the use of alcohol and their motives for drinking, and have an impact on their decisions about how and whether to drink.

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the research, exploring how the findings are supported by the theoretical model and suggest some implications for reducing university problematic drinking. This chapter also indicates the limitations of the present research and some directions for future study.

### **6.1 Summary of Key Findings and Theoretical Explanations**

This research was aimed at understanding drinking patterns among university students, and to answer the question of how and why there exist gendered and culturally diverse patterns of university problematic drinking. In order to answer these questions, it was necessary to find out how a student's consumption of alcohol varied according to gender and cultural background.

#### **6.1.1 Gendered and cultural diverse patterns of university problematic drinking**

The first finding of this research was that the amount of alcohol consumption varied according to an individual's gender and culture background. Generally speaking, male students tended to drink more alcohol and more frequently as compared with female students. The research also found that there is a large gap between people from the West and people from Asian cultures in terms of alcohol consumption. Students of Western origin consumed more alcohol than those of Asian origin. This finding parallels previous literature's finding, that binge drinking is more common among young Western male adults (Paul et al., 2011).

New findings also emerged: when taking both gender and cultural background into consideration, gender differences in the amount of alcohol consumption were less marked than the impact of culture on an individual's drinking patterns. That is, the difference in drinking behaviour between students from different cultural backgrounds was greater than the difference between people of different gender.

The gendered and culturally diverse patterns of university problematic drinking may be explained by Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977). Theory of practice views social contexts to be

embedded in individual behaviours. And the individual behaviours can be shaped by cultural orientations, personal trajectories, and other social resources within a specific social context. In this case, social contexts such as the culture in which people are educated, the norms that they internalize, and the institutions with which they interact are embodied in their drinking behaviour and produce enduring orientations to their action. Given the diverse social contexts in which individuals are socialized, their drinking patterns varied.

### **6.1.2 Situational dispositions and individual's drinking behaviour**

This research also found that being a university student meant having to deal with both the sense of self-control and idea of normative drinking. A high level of self-management cultivated through schooling and/or family values might lower the risk of getting into hazardous situations; however, it did not help to reduce the frequency of drinking on campus. This might result from the fact that norms for drinking on campus affect students' identity; being a university student meant conforming to perceptions of normative drinking behaviour. According to Bourdieu (1977), social practice and the factors that influence action are situated within a specific *field*. A field is characterized by its own logic of action and these principles of action structure the choices and preferences of individuals in these contexts. In this case, students' drinking behaviours are situated in the field of activities outside formal classes in the postsecondary institution. Students acquire habitus, which regulates the patterns of drinking behaviour within specific situations.

On campus, students tended to overestimate the alcohol consumption of other students. And the perceptions of other students' normative drinking behaviours strongly influence a student's own drinking behaviour. By internalizing drinking norms in the university, students are socialized into a system of dispositions that enables them to produce on the appropriate occasion skilful social activity (Bourdieu, 1977). Since heavy and frequent drinking was justified as the norm in university culture, university students tended to increase their alcohol intake to match the drinking norms on campus (Broadwater et al., 2006; Johnston & White, 2003). And as such, within informal activities such as drinking parties, students may pursue their interests and accumulate symbolic capital as it relates to these fields (Joas & Knöbl, 2009).

Although a normative drinking culture is pervasive in universities in Western countries, a considerable number of students use alcohol responsibly. The third finding of this research was that an individual's intentions to engage in alcohol use were influenced by his or her attitudes



towards alcohol use. Nondrinkers showed a negative view towards alcohol use, while alcohol users felt more positive about it, believing that alcohol could be harmless when used responsibly. The most common view towards alcohol use, as expressed by alcohol users in this research, was that it is acceptable in moderation. Such a positive attitude towards alcohol might be a reflection of the normative drinking culture in the university.

### **6.1.3 The motive for drinking and its cultural roots**

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice views habitus as the mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, because of its infinite capacity for generating thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions. The fourth finding of this research was that social and enhancement motives were the pivotal factors motivating students to consume alcohol while at university, while drinking for coping and in order to conform were less notable. This finding parallels the previous literature showing that social and enhancement motives were strong predictors of alcohol use among university students, but that coping motives were not, because of the importance of social reasons for problematic alcohol use in this specific age group (Kong & Bergman, 2010). Moreover, no substantial gender differences in terms of motives for drinking were found in this research. Both men and women believed that, for the most part, they drank in order to socialize. The findings in the previous literature, which women tend to drink alcohol because they are emotionally depressed (Swanson et al., 2004), was not prevalent in this research.

Although no substantial gender differences related to motive for drinking were found in this research, individuals' drinking attitudes and motives were found to have cultural roots. Motives for drinking varied slightly between people from different cultural backgrounds. Students of Western origin tended to drink for the sake of socializing or enhancement, and seldom drank for coping or in order to conform. Students of Asian origin were more likely to drink in order to cope with problems, especially when they drank alone or with close friends. According to the theory of practice, the individual behaviour can be shaped by cultural orientations. As a system of dispositions, culture influences individual's decision-making by setting thoughts and preferences on a particular action. The culturally varied motive of drinking may be because of the significant role culture plays in shaping people's values and ethical norms and therefore influences individuals' attitudes towards the use of alcohol.

#### **6.1.4 The interplay of gender and culture habitus**

Although individual attitudes and motives influenced individual's decision about whether or not to use alcohol, the differences in social norms, role expectations, and values clearly correlated with gender and ethnic differences in drinking behaviour. Some religions also regulate individual's drinking behaviour, not only through religious faith but also the patriarchy gender expectations implied in that religion.

Individuals conform to norms through actions or behaviours, demonstrating that they are a particular kind of person. And by doing this, they validate an identity. When identity is validated or meanings attached to human behaviour are turned into structure, they begin to constrain or at least have an impact on an individual's behaviour (Scott & Marshall, 2009). The reason why some students of Asian origin did not drink may result from the fact that they were closely attached to their cultural identity and had not experienced a normative drinking culture at home.

Habitus embodies parts of our identities in that we have set preferences that influence our behaviour. Different types of habitus and bases of student identity may serve as predispositions to act (or not act in) particular ways. Although not directly related to alcohol use, Asian culture emphasizes the values of responsibility, interdependence, moderation, and restraint (Hong et al., 2011; Liu & Iwamoto, 2007), and has a strong impact on the drinking attitudes of students of Asian origin. By affecting one's predispositions towards drinking, it protects students from problematic drinking. Another major aspect of Asian culture is the strong family tie. The norms and values against alcohol use are reinforced through connection to family and obedience to older family members (Hong et al., 2011). On the other hand, students of Asian origin are not fully attached to the drinking norms on Western campuses, where frequent and heavy drinking are acceptable. As suggested by Huerta and Borgonovi (2010), the lack of social stigma about drinking encourages alcohol consumption in Western society. Moreover, Asian students are more fully absorbed into a student identity; at least as far as the study part of the student identity is concerned. They believe that the primary mission of being a student is to study and anything that distracts their studying should be avoided.

The fifth finding of this research is that gender plays an important role in explaining an individual's drinking behaviour, especially for female students. The internalization of traditional gender roles and expectations can explain why women drink less than men. Although cultures vary, gender identity and the understanding of social expectations about being female

significantly influence women's attitudes towards alcohol consumption. Women who internalize traditional gender attitudes tend to drink less because they do not want to embarrass themselves and damage their reputation.

According to Bourdieu (1977), one of the fundamental effects of habitus is the production of a common sense world. The meaning or common sense of maleness and femaleness produced by habitus governs the bodily experiences of an individual. "Bodily hex is political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of feeling and thinking." (Bourdieu, 1977, p.94) The dispositions associated with gender identity influence the way individuals feel and think, as well as their perceptions of the rules and values attached to their gender.

Because gender role and gender identity are culturally constructed, individuals' cultural backgrounds mediate the effect of gender on their attitude to alcohol and, hence, on their drinking behaviour. According to Bourdieu (1977), structures are active only when embodied in a competence acquired in the course of a particular history. Since gender role is a cultural and social creation in a particular history, there are variations in the magnitude of differences in gender roles and expectations. For example, unlike exaggerated gender roles in Asian culture, gender roles in Western culture may be somewhat less categorical. This research indicated that traditional gender roles and role expectations are more evident among Asian students; thus, the higher level of internalization of traditional gender roles by Asian women explains the differences in alcohol use between Asian and Western women and might be a factor in protecting women of Asian background from the drinking culture that prevails in the West. A woman drinking is not as socially acceptable in Asian society. Women who drink or get drunk are judged harshly. Knowing this, female students from Asian backgrounds avoid using alcohol or getting drunk, in order to protect their reputation. In Western culture, especially among young adults, people tend to see men and women in a more egalitarian way; women are less socialized to obey and are less often judged according to stereotypes. That is why in the present research, female students of Western cultural background feel that to censure a drunk woman is to apply a double standard, and do not see drinking alcohol as a male prerogative.

To sum up, the gendered and culturally diverse patterns of university problematic drinking can be explained by Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977). Individual's drinking behaviour is shaped by habitus associating with their cultural orientations, personal experiences, and other

social resources within social contexts. Habitus, as “the dialectic of objectification and embodiment”, engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions and all actions consistent with particular conditions (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 95). Individuals are socialized into the habitus that enables them to set preferences on who we are and choose the appropriate behaviours according to specific occasions.

In this research, the group habitus (gender and ethnic groups), associated with social contexts, influences the drinking attitude of its group members and as such governs their drinking patterns. Since the history of the individual is never anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his or her group, each individual disposition may be seen as a structured variation of its group habitus. Therefore, given that each individual disposition is a variation of a group habitus, students may adopt a particular habitus only with a certain degree of probability, and this habitus also allows for the possible variation of drinking patterns of members of the same group (e.g., students of Asian origin). Although cultural and gender habitus are partially adopted, they play an important role in affecting the way individuals think and act. In this case, group habitus influence individual’s attitudes and motives of drinking alcohol and therefore influence their drinking behaviours.

## **6.2 Implications: Risk Reduction and Protection**

### **6.2.1 Correct the misconception**

Correlating closely with student identity, the participants in this study misperceived binge drinking as the drinking norm; they tended to believe that everyone at university drank alcohol. Prevention campaigns, such as What’s Your Cap at the U of S, might have the effect of reducing the normative drinking culture on campus. Another preventive strategy could be to provide “accurate information contrasting perceived and actual descriptive drinking norms” (Rinker & Neighbors, 2013, p. 2922), thereby separating the students’ identities from what they perceive as the normative drinking culture at university. Instead of alarming them by telling them how many people drink excessively on campus, preventive strategies should aim at conveying how many people do *not* use alcohol or use it in moderation; that is, how many do not exceed the low-risk drinking guidelines (Broadwater et al., 2006) showing that their peers are “not as reckless as they think” (Kluger, 2001, p. 42; Swanson et al., 2004).

This research found that individuals’ drinking behaviours related to their attitudes. In an attempt to modify attitudes that tend to promote alcohol use on campus, such campaigns might

have preventive efforts. Many university students believe that going to a drinking party is the only social thing to do; that “being in university means being in bars.” Campus initiatives could focus on attaching positive and healthy norms to university student identity. Alternative non-alcoholic activities, such as sports, artistic activities, and parties without alcohol should be created for students. As revealed by the What’s Your Cap campaign, responsible drinking can be developed through education (Robinson et al., 2012). Knowledge of how to protect oneself from the consequences of problem and dangerous drinking should be given to students at the beginning of their university life or even before. Since binge drinking is exacerbated in school residences, intervention campaigns could put more effort into “marketing” binge drinking prevention strategies in the university residence.

### **6.2.2 To be culturally sensitive**

Aside from prevention, on-campus campaigns could take into consideration the diversity of the student body at their university, especially in Canada. Interventions should be culturally sensitive. As found in this research, motives for drinking vary somewhat by culture; thus, though most students drank for social or enhancement motives, there is still a group of international students who drink to cope with stress. Prevention campaigns could help international students to deal with stress and other emotional difficulties, for example, by providing information about available counselling services. In addition, as suggested by Vaughan et al. (2011), since cultural factors can play an important role in internalizing negative attitudes towards the use of alcohol, preventing problematic drinking should also focus on that role (Vaughan et al., 2011). Campaigns could use culture as an intervention to downplay pro-alcohol attitudes on campus, thereby preventing students from even beginning to binge drink.

### **6.2.3 Ethnic culture and/or tradition as a restraint**

As mentioned earlier, one implication of this research concerns prevention and risk reduction. Given that the drinking patterns of university students are, to some extent, culturally determined, factors reducing the risk of problematic drinking can be derived from those same factors helping Asian students avoid drinking or drinking to excess. Norms and values such as interdependence, moderation, and responsibility (Hong et al., 2011; Liu & Iwamoto, 2007) are embedded in Asian culture. Such values and norms are reinforced through long-term socialization and serve as factors protecting Asian students from problematic drinking. Another major trait of Asian culture is strong family ties; norms and values against alcohol use are

reinforced through family connection and obedience to older family members (Hong et al., 2011).

Although people in the West are not socialized in an anti-alcohol environment, family connections and one's moral obligations can still be used as a restraint. According to social identity theory, "engaging in attitudinally consistent behaviour is dependent on perceptions of support from a behaviourally relevant reference group" (Johnston & White, 2003); thus, attaching oneself to tradition and to one's sources of moral authority can serve as a preventive strategy against problematic drinking in a university environment.

Besides reinforcing the connections between university students and their family members, and attachment to their moral group, the value of moderation deriving from Asian culture may be modified and used in preventing binge drinking. Prevention programs could aim at switching the binge drinking culture and educating university students to embrace a culture of moderation and, as such, to reduce the risk of results from excessive drinking.

### **6.3 Future Research**

Future research on university problematic drinking could benefit from this research. The power of explanation of variables, such as "gender," "culture background," or "race" could be unpacked into various elements. For example, gender is not only the self-identification of being male or female; it is socially and culturally constructed. Gender identity is associated with a series of role expectations. Knowledge about gendered behaviour such as university problematic drinking would expand if "gender" were carefully unpacked into different elements.

Other directions for future study could focus on the drinking patterns of various minority groups. For example, drinking behaviours of Aboriginal students or African American students could be of considerable interest. A more adequate understanding of problematic drinking among minority students could be generated through taking into consideration the process of acculturation.

The present research provided a study for considering individual's habitus in the study of university binge drinking. There may not yet be adequate understanding of the role that habitus plays in engendering the drinking attitudes, motives, and drinking behaviours of individuals, especially for those problematic drinkers in this research. It would be valuable for future studies to explore the important role that habitus plays in the drinking behaviours of problem drinkers. For example, instead of interviewing first- and second- year university students, future research

could target students who frequently binge drink or drink exceeding the low risk drinking guidelines, and to reveal how one's habitus can be related to their overconsumption of alcohol in the perspective Bourdieu's theory of practice. Questions such as do problem drinkers maintain a certain drinking subculture, and how symbolic capitals are acquired in drinking activities would also be valuable to be explored.

There needs to be a better understanding of how habitus in association with social contexts shapes the drinking behaviours of problem drinkers within the informal activities in the university. According to Bourdieu (1979), habitus has both structured and structuring characteristics. There are mutual interactions between habitus (at both individual and group levels) and the behaviours of individuals. On one hand, individuals acquire habitus, which regulates their behaviours within specific social contexts. On the other hand, changes in circumstances such as an individual's life experiences and overarching social contexts may lead to changes in an individual's habitus. In particular, how problem drinkers develop their habitus in the normalized binge drinking culture and within the society where alcohol is encouraged to be overly consumed by alcohol industry, media and commercial advertisements needs to be explored in the future. The normalized drinking culture and culture that supports female's overconsumption of alcohol are risk factors of overconsumption of alcohol. Understanding how these risk factors influence an individual's drinking behaviour through the development of their habitus can provide more targeted interventions for problematic drinking among university students.

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## APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

### **Project Title: Problem Drinking Among University Students**

#### **Researcher:**

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#### **Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:**

- The research is designed to examine the drinking experiences of students in the University of Saskatchewan. The purpose of the research is for a better understanding of the drinking behaviours of college students and how it can be related to student's gender identity and cultural background.

#### **Procedures:**

- 20 interviews will be conducted among first and second year students at the University of Saskatchewan. Advertisements will be handed out and first or second year students who are willing to participate in this research could contact the research via email. In order to collect rich information, participants will be asked about their drinking experiences and their attitudes towards drinking and binge drinking. The interview questions will cover the topics of participants' alcohol use (the frequency of drinking and the amount of drinking in one occasion), family values towards alcohol, their own attitudes about alcohol use and binge drinking, and student's family and school life (the involvement of family members, what are their peers like, the relationship with parents and peers, and pressures to be conformed). The

interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed for data analysis. The research will take place on campus and the interview is expected to vary in length from 45 minutes to one hour.

**Potential Risks:**

- There might be some emotional discomfort. Participants might feel compunctious or embarrassed when they talk about some drinking experiences. Participants may answer the questions they are comfortable with and they have the right to refuse to answer some or all of the questions. Participants' confidentiality will be safely protected and pseudonym will be used. For those who attending binge drinking frequently, recalling some of the bad drinking experience may lead to emotional discomfort. The researcher will advise the participant that University Counselling Services may provide some support services. The interview will be terminated if the participants feel extremely uncomfortable and would not control their emotion.

**Potential Benefits:**

- Given that qualitative method is seldom applied to the study of college drinking, this research, by conducting interview, will provide a new angle of seeing college drinking. Also, the rich information collected via interview may allow the researcher finding in-depth reason of alcohol use of university students. Prevention serious consequences from happening from the misuse of alcohol will be facilitated by knowing the reasons of alcohol (mis)use. As such, college problematic drinking might be moderated and controlled.

**Compensation:**

- In appreciation for their participation, participants will receive an honorarium valued at \$ 10.

**Confidentiality:**

- Although the researcher and the researched may contact each other in an identifying way (i.e., via email), the identifiable information about the participant in research findings will not be disclosed. Identifying information is stored separately from the data collected. The master list is destroyed when data collection is complete and it is no longer required. Although direct quotations from the interview may be reported, participants will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information will be removed from the report. Participant's interview will be audiotaped. And they may request that the recording device be turned off

any time. After the interview, and prior to the data being included in the final report, participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as they see fit.

- Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission to:

I grant permission to be audio taped: Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

I grant permission to have my organization's name used: Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

I wish to remain anonymous: Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: \_\_\_\_\_

You may quote me in your data analysis: Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

- **Storage of Data:**
- The data collected in the interview and associated material will be safeguarded and securely stored by Professor Colleen Dell at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years post publication. The audio recording will be password protected and all of the hardcopies will be signed and sealed and locked in a cabinet. When the data is no longer required, it will then be destroyed (electronic file deletion and shredded).

**Right to Withdraw:**

- The participation is voluntary and participants can answer only those questions that they are comfortable with. One may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.
- Participant's right to withdraw data from the study will apply until February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015. After this date, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data. When participants withdraw, their data will be deleted from the research project and destroyed, if desired.

**Follow up:**

- To obtain the summary of results from the study, participants may contact the researcher via email and an electronic version of the result will be provided.

**Questions or Concerns:**

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1;
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca) (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

**Continued or On-going Consent:**

- If there is a need for some replenishment of the data, the renewal of consent may apply. The researcher will first contact the participants and state what kind of data is needed. Once the participant confirmed to add some data to the research, renewal consent will be signed by both participants and researcher.

**SIGNED CONSENT**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

- Do you drink?  
If yes . . .
- On an average, how many drinks do you have per week and per occasion?
- What do you think is the reason for drinking (on a moderate amount or exceed the moderate amount)?
- Have you been to parties where alcohol is provided? If yes, on an average, how many times do you go to such parties per month? What do you usually do in these parties? Why do you go to the party? In your opinion, what might you get from such parties?

If not . . .

- What reason(s) do you think makes you do not drink or do not go to binge parties? What do you usually do when you fell stressed?

For all participants:

- How do you like alcohol? What's your attitude to it? At what circumstance would you want a drink (or more drinks)?
- Do your parents and siblings drink? What is their attitude towards drinking?
- Do your close friends drink? What is their attitude towards drinking?
- Do you have a drinking culture in your daily life? If yes, what's is it? And how do you like it?
- Are you a native student in Canada?
- If yes, in your opinion, what would the drinking attitude of people in western society be?
- If not, where are you from? What is the drinking attitude in your motherland or in your culture?
- Do you think your gender identity have an impact on your consumption of alcohol? If yes, how would it impact your choice of drinking or do not drinking?
- How do you like your school life? How do you get along with your friends and peers?
- Do you still remain a close connection with your family member? If yes, how and why do you remain such connection? If not, please indicate the reason.

- Could you share one of your drinking memories? You may share whatever you want.